The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR L. PAUL "JERRY" BREMER, III

Interviewed By: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: What is your full, official name?

BREMER: L. Paul Bremer, III.

Q: How did Jerry come out of Bremer?

BREMER: I was named after my grandfather who was alive when I was born. He was L. Paul Bremer, Sr. and my father was L. Paul Bremer, Jr. They wanted to honor my grandfather but my father was called Paul, and they didn't want to have two "Pauls" running around the house. So they named me after my grandfather. Jerry was my name for my saint day. I was born on St. Jerome's Day so I was Jerry from the day I was born.

Q: What does 'L' stand for?

BREMER: Lewis.

Q: When and where were you born?

BREMER: I was born just outside of Hartford, Connecticut in September 1941.

Q: Where outside?

BREMER: Simsbury. My father was a teacher at the Westminster Boys' School at that time, just before Pearl Harbor. He and my mother, who was a young bride, were living at the Westminster School.

Q: Let's start on your father's side; what do you know about your father's side?

BREMER: Not an awful lot. They were originally from Northern Germany, presumably at some point from Bremen because Bremer means citizen of Bremen. They seem to have come to the United States when the German migrations came in the middle of the 19th century, roughly a hundred and fifty years ago.

Q: They were what we call the '48ers'.

BREMER: Yes, in that same period when many Irish and Germans came. I don't know very much about it. My grandfather and grandmother on that side lived in a small town outside of New York in New Jersey. They were not well off. I don't think they were poor, but neither were they well off.

Q: Do you know what he was doing?

BREMER: He was a college-trained engineer. He died some years after the birth of our first child, Paul.

Q: Your father. What sort of upbringing

BREMER: He attended public schools in New Jersey and then went to Hamilton. He went rather young and graduated at the age of 20. He had a significant language capability which eventually became important to my career and he was an excellent athlete. He was an alternate in the Olympic Games in 1936 in fencing after he graduated from Hamilton which was in 1935. He went on to get a Masters Degree from Hamilton the next year.

Q: Hamilton being a college in upstate New York.

BREMER: He became a teacher of French, Italian and Latin and that's what took him to Westminster. He taught languages there until the war broke out.

Q: On your mother's side; where did they come from?

BREMER: My mother's side was more mixed. Her father's family was Scottish and came to the United States a long time ago, in the early 19th century. They seem to have been quite well off as early as the late 19th century. They were involved in financial

business, both insurance and stock brokering. Her mother's side was German. Her maiden name was Grundner. I don't know much about my mother's mother's side; but my mother grew up with her parents and family in Rye, New York, outside of New York City. My grandfather, her father, by the 1920s was involved in the stock market and seems to have very cleverly gotten out of the market before the crash, so he was able to preserve his assets. She had certainly a privileged childhood.

Q: Did she go to college?

BREMER: She did. She started Sarah Lawrence before the war but then got married and dropped out. She had finished two years. But she went back to Sarah Lawrence some 30 years later. She wound up graduating the same year her daughter, my sister Lyn, graduated from Sarah Lawrence in 1967. My mother then went on to become a teacher.

Q: How did your mother and father meet, do you know?

BREMER: They met in Vero Beach Florida where her parents had a house. My father was in Florida as a tutor for another family.

Q: Were you the only child?

BREMER: No, I was the oldest of five.

Q: Good Heavens. So I won't ask what your mother was doing for many of those years.

BREMER: Well, she raised the first three during the war. My father was in the navy and subsequently they had two more children. After the war, she taught herself photography and became a very successful professional photographer which career she pursued for more than 20 years -- until she went back to college. There she studied art history and subsequently became a college level teacher of that subject.

Q: Do you know much about your father's naval experience?

BREMER: Again it was somewhat relevant to my decision to go into public service. After Pearl Harbor, when he was still teaching, my father decided he needed to get into the navy. He was tall and very thin and was in fact under the weight limit, whatever it was in those days, to get into the navy. So when he went to the recruiting office, he bent his knees, hoping to take a couple of inches off his height so that he would fall within the weight. He was accepted and commissioned as a Lieutenant. I am sure that the recruiting officer knew exactly what he was doing. It's hard to imagine that any recruiting officers were being very fastidious about metrics in the wake of the attack. So he went into the navy. He served on convoys doing escort duty and they protected our shipping against to attack U-boats between the Gulf of Mexico and the East Coast and eventually also convoys crossing the Atlantic.

Q: Did sort of the navy experience sort of permeate the family?

BREMER: No, the navy itself was not a big thing. But what was certainly important in my decision subsequently to join the Foreign Service was my father's very strong belief, which he often repeated around the dinner table to the children, that we had been lucky to have been born in the greatest country and at a wonderful time; so every citizen owed some public service back to his country if he could do it. It was a very important concept to me.

Q: Toward the end of the war was when you come into remembrance. What was your father doing?

BREMER: At the end of the war he went into business, international business, which again had some eventual influence on me. He was initially working for a couple of German companies involved in the clothing industry, yarn and clothing industry. He stayed in international business for the rest of his life.

Q: Where did you grow up then?

BREMER: During the war, we lived in Rye, New York. My mother and three oldest children lived with her family during the war since my father was on navy duty and away most of the time. We lived in Rye for a couple of years after the war and then we moved to New Canaan, Connecticut in 1947, which is where I grew up.

Q: Early post-war New Canaan, what was it like?

BREMER: Well, it was not as fancy as it subsequently became. It was a pretty quiet place. It was literally at the end of a railroad line, which it still is. I would have to check what the population was but it was maybe 10 or 12,000. It was a small place. My father was working in New York so it was a long commute for him; but to me it was a very happy place to grow up. It was suburban, not quite countryside, but it was a very happy place.

Q: Did you have a town green and all that?

BREMER: We had a God 's acre town green with three churches on it.

Q: Let's talk a bit about family life. You mentioned talking around the table. Was this sort of a feature of life, everybody getting together and having meals together and all that?

BREMER: It was; although with three older children, then a gap of eight years and then two more kids, we were almost two families. But we did get together at dinner; at least we tried to eat dinners together if my father got home in time from New York. There was always a lot of talk around the table.

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

BREMER: My father was a staunch Republican, a conservative Republican. My mother was less politically active. It was not something that she spent a lot of time on.

Q: Did world events come up at the table?

BREMER: Yes, quite often. My father was very interested in world events and with his background with languages and the fact that he was in international business, international affairs was often discussed around the table. It was certainly an early interest of mine. I remember getting involved in my first real history class in seventh grade. I started French in eighth grade and had an excellent class in international relations in ninth grade. I remember progression in that period where international affairs became more important to me and language.

Q: How about religion?

BREMER: My parents were both Episcopalians but they were not big believers. We went to church when they decided to go to church.

Q: So it was not a major influence.

BREMER: No.

Q: Let's talk about growing up as a kid in New Canaan. What did you do through elementary school?

BREMER: I played some sports. I took up golf. My father was often the club champion, so I played golf although I was never close to his level. That was my major summer sport and then we skied in the winter. I had lots of friends. I was in the same school from kindergarten through ninth grade so you form a lot of friendships.

Q: New Canaan

BREMER: New Canaan Country Day School, a private school.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

BREMER: Not a great reader. What got me into reading, interestingly enough was science fiction. I started reading Heinlein and these guys in the fourth or fifth grade. That got me into reading. Then when I started getting interested in history and international affairs, I started to read history.

Q: In school was there anything that particularly, a subject you particularly liked and a subject you didn't like?

BREMER: I liked history and international relations. I found languages interesting already. I started Latin in the fifth or sixth grade and French in the eighth grade. I liked

those. I was good in math until later when I hit calculus, at which point I derailed on math. I don't remember any subject I particularly didn't like. I probably have suppressed it.

Q: Any teacher in elementary school that you particularly recall?

BREMER: Yes, my seventh grade history teacher, a guy named Benson was very good. Raymond Burns and his wife in ninth grade taught what we would call international relations or social studies. They were very good and quite liberal. So I got an early opportunity to try out my increasingly conservative views. They were a good and sympathetic foil. My first French teacher Mme Liotard was superb and had a big influence on my life. From the first day, she never spoke a word of English in our class -- at that time a rather revolutionary system called "la methode directe". She was a terrific teacher. Those three made a big impression on me.

Q: You finished ninth grade when?

BREMER: 1956.

Q: At that time had sort of the Cold War intruded into New Canaan at all?

BREMER: Obviously it had intruded. Like most school children, we had "duck and cover" exercises from time to time. So that gave us at least a sense of the dangers of atomic weapons. 1956 was, of course, the year of the Hungarian Revolution and the Suez Crisis but frankly I don't remember those events making an imprint on me. Though when I went away to school in the fall of 1956, at Andover, I met several Hungarian boys who had fled the country during the uprising.

Q: It would have been earlier on but I was wondering whether your father brought home, did he ever talk about the McCarthy period?

BREMER: I am sure he did but I don't remember.

Q: When you finished at Country Day, where did you go?

BREMER: I went to Philips Academy Andover. In those days the New Canaan Country School which only went through 9th grade, tended to feed to the various prep schools. Some of my classmates went to the high school. The New Canaan high school in those days was not as good as it subsequently has become because the town did not yet have the tax base. So I went to Andover for the last three years of high school.

Q: I spent four years at Kent. I say four years on my knees. It was run by monks in those days.

BREMER: Our son went to Kent. He loved it.

Q: I didn't. At the end I really appreciated it. But it took about four years.

BREMER: He made his deepest friends at Kent.

Q: How did you find Andover?

BREMER: I didn't like it. I was very small for my age and there was still quite a lot of hazing going on at boarding schools in those days and I was mercilessly hazed. I did not have a happy time. It was a big school; there were over a thousand students.

Q: I went to Seton Day Hall for a couple of months there.

BREMER: It's almost a college size with a very large campus. So if you were small, as I was, and not involved in sports it was easy to get lost. The advantage for me was that I actually studied at Andover, a claim I cannot safely make for my time at college. I was involved in some extracurricular activities -- but, basically, I wound up studying and that was probably good for me.

Q: Again, how did you find the teaching?

BREMER: The teaching was excellent. I continued with French, Latin and math as a focus at Andover. I did well until I got to calculus which really derailed my math career; but I continued French and Latin, I mentioned my father had taught Latin and I had one of those conversations that every son eventually has with his father where I said I have had enough Latin. I had done five or six years. He said, "No, you should continue Latin" and I said, "But it's a dead language. What use can it be?" He said, "It will help you in your future with other languages and even with English." Of course I ignored my father, stopped Latin and he was absolutely right. I should have continued.

Q: I have discovered, my father told me all sorts of things. He was a salesman and all of a sudden doing this job I have now, I use an awfully lot of sales talk.

BREMER: None of us ever listen to our fathers. It is a good lesson and one I, without notable success, try to use on my son.

Q: Did you find you were able to partake of life in Boston at all?

BREMER: No, we were pretty well locked up. At most we had two weekends a semester or something and I usually tried to go back home to Connecticut when I could. I didn't get into Boston very often.

Q: Was Abbott Academy producing young ladies?

BREMER: Abbott Academy was down the road at that time, separate from Andover. We also didn't have much contact with them. To our constant disappointment the rules were all also rather rigorously policed.

Q: While you were there, were you pointed towards anything, I mean, were you thinking about anything?

BREMER: I guess I would say my interest continued to be in history and international relations through my studies. But I would not say I had any real focus. My extracurricular interest was in music. I had studied piano from the age or five or six and I liked music. My father was a very good musician which went with his languages. At Andover I joined the band which in football season was the marching band and the rest of the season was the school orchestra.

Q: There you were with your piano.

BREMER: No actually, there I was in the percussion section in the band. In the marching band, I carried and played a huge bass drum, which essentially dwarfed me. If I suggested that someone, like my parents, come to a football game to see me playing in the band, all they could see was this mysteriously moving drum. Senior year some friends and I established a Dixieland band. We played at the school and did some concerts in New England. We were not great, but we had a lot of fun.

I don't think I would say during my time at Andover I had a clear focus on life.

Q: Looking back on it, did Andover since well, two of our presidents have come out of Andover; both Bushes went to Andover, didn't they?

BREMER: I guess, I know this one did. I don't remember about his father.

Q: Did you have any particular, looking back on it, did this give you contacts to the world?

BREMER: No. I have never made much effort to stay in touch with my Andover colleagues. But I did get a very good, solid education there. I have been back to Andover only once in 47 years and I won't go back again. I am sure it is a very fine institution but I did not have a happy time there.

Q: Fair enough.

You were there during the latter part of the Eisenhower years. Did you have any feel for politics?

BREMER: I will tell you one thing that made a big impression on me was Sputnik. I think Sputnik was launched in the fall of '57. I heard that it was going to pass overhead where we could see it and I remember going out on a very cold New England night, I think in November, and standing in the soccer field in the dark and watching Sputnik go over. It made quite an impression on me. Did I then think of the broader implication? No, but it was a pretty impressive just the same.

Q: Normally one thinks of Andover particularly feeding into Harvard and all. What happened with you?

BREMER: Actually, in those days Andover fed Yale and Exeter fed Harvard. I went to Yale with a number of my classmates from Andover. I graduated in ’59. I applied for early admission at Yale. I was accepted in December of ’58 and went to Yale in September 1959.

Q: So you were the class of ’63?

BREMER: ’63, yes.

Q: When you got there, how did you find Yale?

BREMER: It was a great, refreshing change. Freedom was the most important impression. Andover felt rather monastic and you were pretty constrained.

I went into a program which I think has recently been revived at Yale called ‘directed studies’. It was dropped for some years for being politically incorrect in its emphasis on the “Western canon” of learning. I did not apply for this “directed studies”. As I recall, Yale advised me to take that course of studies which was involved taking related courses. There was a philosophy course, an art history course, a course in literature and a course in history, all of which started back, not quite in pre historic but let’s say at least Greek times. So you would be reading Greek philosophers, studying Greek art history, reading Greek literature and getting Greek history.

Q: Sounds like the Hutchinson St. John’s University of Chicago, St. John’s College idea of great books.

BREMER: It was all connected. DS, as it was called, involved a selected group of students and small classes for the freshman and sophomore years. I found it very challenging and stimulating. In particular, I enjoyed the art history courses. My parents were both interested in art. My mother eventually became a teacher of art history and we had art around the house. But I had never really thought about the art until I started studying art history at Yale.

Q: I assume Yale was not coed at that time. To turn out well educated gentlemen, more or less.

BREMER: I don’t know what their curriculum objective was but the idea behind the DS program was to expose you to the great thinking of the last couple of millennia. No women except in the various graduate schools.

Q: I am not using that in a pejorative sense. This is what ideal colleges should do.

BREMER: They dropped directed studies at some point, I don't know when. Apparently it has now been brought back at Yale.

Q: Did the outside world, both American political life and also foreign affairs intrude much?

BREMER: Yes, by this time I was a little more mature and aware of what was going on. I became involved in the radio station at Yale which in those days was like a club or even a fraternity. You had to "heel" or "rush" to be accepted. These were the early Kennedy years. I remember watching the over flight of fighter jets during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. I don't know where those jets were coming or where they were going; but I remember standing out and watching them fly over New Haven.

Q: Did the Kennedy election, the Nixon/Kennedy debates and all, it is one of those landmark things that people who went through it really got people more engaged than almost any other election than I can think of. Did that?

BREMER: I remember reading about it but I don't think I watched it.

Q: You weren't engaged in that?

BREMER: No. Kennedy visited Yale while I was there, after he was elected president, and I remember watching his motorcade go down to the green in New Haven. It must have been in '62.

Q: Did foreign affairs, diplomacy, anything come to your attention particularly?

BREMER: Yes, I was interested in foreign affairs at this time. I was concerned by Castro's takeover of Cuba which was in '59 during my freshman year there. I remember being critical of the outcome of the Kennedy-Khrushchev summit in Vienna in mid '61, which was followed rather quickly by the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis. I remember being concerned that we were being too weak, vis-à-vis the Soviets.

At the radio station, I eventually moved up to become a member of the Executive Committee or Board which gave me a chance to write editorials for broadcast. So the station became an outlet for my developing interest in international affairs.

Q: Were there political movements on the Yale campus because this is usually where political types test out their muscles, getting out organizing?

BREMER: I was in the political union. I had been in something like the political union at Andover and I was in the political union at Yale. But I was not active politically except for my activities at the radio station.

Q: Do you recall any teachers that particularly stuck in your mind?

BREMER: The ones I recall were mostly history teachers. At Yale I began to get deep into history and the history of art. Vincent Scully was one of the great teachers at Yale. He taught art history courses. John Morton Blum, who was a great scholar and is still alive, taught a course on Teddy Roosevelt and early 20th century American history. Hajo Holborn was a masterful teacher, probably the best I had. He taught 19th century European history. The three of them really stand out in my memory.

Q: I am trying to capture the times. When you are studying history, I would suspect Asian history, African history, Middle Eastern history and maybe even Latin American history were not particularly well pushed as far as

BREMER: No, I did mostly European. Yale had a good Chinese history department that goes back to the early part of the century.

Q: Yale in China.

BREMER: I recall that I did one survey course in Asian history; it did not make a big impression. I was really focused on European and American history.

Q: Had diplomacy as a career come across your thinking?

BREMER: It was probably in the back of my mind. I always had in the back of my mind my father's admonition about doing public service. But I would not say that it was yet developed at that point.

Q: What about the CIA because I have come at a little bit earlier time but it was just getting organized. I even applied for the CIA and about three or four of my fraternity mates went into the CIA.

BREMER: I have a funny story. My junior year I was approached by a professor who said, "I want you to come to a meeting with somebody I think you should meet. But you mustn't tell anybody. You go to this place at seven o'clock at night and don't tell anybody." I said, "OK.". I had no idea what the professor was talking about. This was not going to be easy because I had seven roommates at this point. So I made excuses to my roommates and scuttled off to this meeting which turned out to be with somebody from the CIA, a recruiter at one of the dean's houses, only to find one of my roommates sitting across the table from me at the meeting. We both later had a great laugh about the admonition to tell nobody. I guess it was a recruiting effort.

Actually, I wrote my senior paper on the Bay of Pigs invasion, which had taken place while I was there, analyzing what I thought were the mistakes that had been made, particularly by President Kennedy. Alan Dulles came to Yale at some point thereafter to do a presentation; I guess it was still part of the recruiting effort because it was a small group of us meeting with Dulles. I told him I had written this paper and he said, "Well, send it to me. I'd like to see what you said." I did. I got it back from him at some point saying, "Nice paper." Obviously, I didn't have access to any classified information and I

was writing it within six or eight months of the invasion so it probably made no impression on Dulles -- if he even bothered to read it, which I doubt. I had those contacts with the CIA and when the time came for me to think about public service, CIA was one of the options I considered.

Q: To capture the spirit of the times, I think this is very much an East Coast establishment place, as well as the Foreign Service.

BREMER: That's true as I am sure your history shows. One of the smartest things the Foreign Service did about this time was doing away with the language requirement for entry. Someone realized that by requiring a language to get in, the Service was automatically selecting a large part of American society out of the Foreign Service recruiting pool because languages tended to be studied more in the Coastal states. It was a very smart thing to drop the language requirement for entry. Basically, you can teach anyone a language. So from about that period, '62 or '63, you no longer had to have a language it to come into the Foreign Service.

Q: I took the exam in '53. Actually, I was in the service and they had a language thing and I took Russian but I didn't pass it but I came in on probation.

So you are getting close to '63 and graduation. Whither?

BREMER: My father had encouraged me to apply for business school because he, I think, felt that I was a good candidate for international business with my languages and his background. So I applied and was accepted at Harvard Business School. But meanwhile I got it into my head -- I think my father helped put it there -- that I would do well before I went to business school to perfect my French by going to school in France. I asked Harvard for a deferment on my acceptance which they granted me and instead went to Institut d'etudes Politiques of the Universite de Paris for about a year and a half.

Q: This would be '63 – '64?

BREMER: Yes.

Q: How did you find that?

BREMER: Well, I had a great time; I can't say I studied very hard. I found the French educational system at that level rather disappointing, which is surprising because Institut d'etudes Politiques is really one of their best. The problem -- and it certainly exploded in 1968 -- was that the professors were god-like; they had almost no contact with students.. So to pass a course all you had to regurgitate what the professor had said in his lectures -- and almost all the courses at that time were lectures. The system was well organized. Stenographers were allowed to sit in on every professor's lectures. They produced a written record of what the professor had said, verbatim. A student could get from the library the printed copy, called "polycopies", of everything a professor had said throughout the whole year. So if you could memorize what he had said and say it back to

him -- the exams were oral -- at the end of the term, you passed. This struck me as a not very creative approach to learning; totally different from the American university experience.

Q: I am interviewing Beth Jones and she was brought up as a Foreign Service kid and she went to school in the Soviet Union and Germany and all where her father was stationed and I think she went to Grinnell and said her teacher said, "And what do you think about this, Miss Jones?" and she found herself absolutely floored; someone asking her what she thought.

BREMER: It was really quite symbolic. In the lecture hall, there was literally a stage in the front. The professors had their own elevator that brought them down backstage and they would walk out onto the stage, deliver their lecture for 45 or 50 minutes, turn around, go backstage, and take the elevator back to their offices. They didn't keep office hours so it was very difficult to go talk to the professor. There was no interaction with the professor about, you know, what do you mean when you said, "de Gaulle should have done this in 1958 instead of that"?

I had a great time because all you had to do was memorize what the professor said; I actually took exams in three courses where I had never attended a single class and not even seen the professor. I just got the transcripts toward the end of the year, memorized what they said and repeated it back to the professors. This left me lots of time to explore Paris.

Q: In your contact with the students, was there sort of a track system? The ones who were going to be the president of France and the elite and all and various prefects and all that, were they sort of already identified as being apart and then the foreigners were off to one side?

BREMER: To some extent. We could take any courses we wanted. So we were mixed in with them. It was clear the French students were the elite. There was no question; they were going to be the diplomats and the leaders of France. They were from the upper classes of France. How hard they studied, I don't know. It certainly was not rigorous. You could get by with doing very little, as I did, or I suppose you could put a lot into it. I haven't stayed in touch with the French students who were there, though periodically in my Foreign Service days I would meet a graduate of Sciences-Po, as the school is known in France.

Q: Did you have much of a chance to sit around in a café and talk to other students?

BREMER: Yes, we did. We spent a lot of time at cafes drinking beer and I spent a lot of time going to concerts because my interest in music was very strong. I inherited from my father a deep love of Bach. There are wonderful old organs in some of the old churches in Paris. So I would go through the paper in the morning and find out where the best concerts were. So Sciences Po was a fun time and I certainly worked my French through

pretty well and I suppose I learned some things. But I did find the educational experience was somewhat disappointing.

Q: Did you find the students, the French students, were they engaged in matters or were they, I am thinking of politics and all that?

BREMER: There was quite a bit of politics. I didn't get involved. In those days the French unions were pretty well controlled by the communists and they always had demonstrations and posters and meetings. I didn't really get involved in it.
Q: I am trying to think; this was '63 to '64?

BREMER: Yes.

Q: Anything?

BREMER: I remember de Gaulle. This was a period after de Gaulle came back in power and he was subject a number of assassination attempts while we were there by the OAS, the group trying to reassert French sovereignty over Algeria. I remember watching his motorcade go through town. It was really quite a thing to see; it was called "la fleche", the arrow. He had motorcycle outriders in a wedge in front of his car. The police cleared the roads well ahead of time and so his motorcade went 90 or 100 miles an hour down the Paris streets. You were well advised to get all the way off the street.

Q: Were there problems of bombs going off in mailboxes and that sort of thing?

BREMER: There was some because the OAS was still active. At night you could hear the OAS sympathizers blow their horns as they went through the streets -- it was a known pattern -- "toot, toot, toot (pause) toot toot". Which stood for "Alg-erie Fran-caise". They never forgave de Gaulle for giving Algeria independence.

Q: Did you find the students, were many of them engaged in that or not?

BREMER: Not that I know of. I think the students at Sciences Po in those days were pretty much establishment people and establishment families. You weren't likely to find many revolutionaries among them.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy?

BREMER: No, none. In fact I very rarely spent time on the Right Bank. That's not entirely true because I actually wound up living on the Right Bank. I found on the bulletin board at Sciences Po somebody who wanted an English speaker to teach English and help translate her articles into English. She was an author and she and her husband had a nice apartment in the 16th Arrondissement which was a fancy area. The trouble was what they offered to me and what I took was a room, a "chambre de bonne" a maid's room which was located on the outside of building. The stairs in those old buildings go up the outside and though I grew up in New England, I had never been as cold in my life

as I was that winter in an unheated, outside room in Paris. On the other hand, the room cost me nothing. The deal was I gave an hour a day of either speaking English to them or translating her articles from French into English and they, in turn, gave me the room. The other drawback was I only got to use the shower only once a week -- this is France after all.

Q: Did your time there give you a taste for foreign life?

BREMER: I suppose it had an impact on me. I enjoyed living in France. I had traveled to Europe a couple of times before as a teenager but this was the first time living abroad and I enjoyed it.

Q: Where did you travel as a teenager?

BREMER: To France and England and during my year and a half in Paris I traveled all over Europe, north and south and once to East Berlin.

Q: Did you go back to business school?

BREMER: Yes, then I went back to business school.

Q: You did that, what, two years?

BREMER: Two years, '64 to '66.

Q: This was business school and this was the case method, wasn't it?

BREMER: Yes.

Q: How did you find it that?

BREMER: I loved it. I mean it was hard but you couldn't find a bigger contrast from the French system of rote learning to the case method where the professor walked in and would say without further ado: "Mr. Bremer, please tell us about this case. What would you do?" and that's all he'd say. After your answer, he worked by Socratic dialogue to draw out your analysis of the case. Then he would invite, no need to encourage, your classmates to attack your analysis. It was the best pedagogical system. I have always felt in subsequent life when I did exercises, military exercises or diplomatic exercises at the State Department, that the case method really brings out the best. It puts you in a situation and you have to decide what you are going to do. You've got to analyze what is going on, identify and assess your alternatives and make a decision -- always with inadequate information. Not much time for theories.

Q: We don't use that very much. Well, in fact our whole, I am talking about the Foreign Service, educational system really is lacking in that.

BREMER: In my junior officer course we did one. I vaguely remember it had something to do with Saudi Arabia and I was playing the ambassador and there was somebody else who was the assistant secretary. We did what you could call a case study. I don't know whether they do it anymore.

Q: They had something called the mid career thing that went off to St. Michaels one time and I remember we did some case things. I was a consular officer basically my career and I found when we had cases, how much different my thinking was than say, political officers. Usually as a consular officer you had to make up your mind so you did it. It is an interesting process for both sides to take a look at each other and realize your training and your background can give you quite a

BREMER: I thought the case method was terrific. I think it is the best way to learn something.

Q: This is one of the practical things I hope will come eventually in future years. People will come back to these oral histories because we are talking about what you did at certain times and extract from this, cases and see, use it as training.

Well, then what were you looking at?

BREMER: At business school in those days you had no latitude on what subjects you studied the first of two years. It was a fixed curriculum. We were on a trimester system and you took a fixed set of classes each trimester. The required courses were intended to give you a feel for basic business subjects, like accounting, production, marketing and so on. My focus at this time was on international business. Before I went to Harvard, I had asked to have a foreign student as a room mate, preferably French and they did assign me a French roommate, Eddy Rousselot. The best way to cope with the enormous workload at the Business school is to form what they call a "study group" where you get a number of students together to analyze the cases together. We had eight students in the group we pulled together and it was quite international -- we had two Brits, a Frenchman, a Peruvian, an Austrian and a couple of Americans. And that encouraged me in the second year to focus mostly on international business and a bit on finance.

Q: With this international study group, did you find that, were some of the students, like the Peruvian taking a different track or something, did you find there was a melding or not?

BREMER: Yes, eventually. Some of the non Americans found school very hard. Not surprisingly, my French roommate who had come through the French system I described found it very difficult to understand the professor wasn't going to tell him the answer -- that he had to come up with the answer or our study group had to come up with a reasonable analysis of the case that we could each defend in class the next day. That was true of most of the Europeans. The Peruvian was of German extraction so you would say he was more European. The Europeans found it quite challenging. They also had the

language issue (except the Brits). I don't blame them. I spoke English and found the first year very challenging.

Q: The American system, I don't know today, things are changing so much, sort of proved itself for bringing out the best in people because there is an awfully lot of "What do you think", well, the style of it.

BREMER: If you go back to this point I made about the lectures at Yale. John Morton Blum and Hajo Holborn who were two of the professors I mentioned, their courses were among the most popular. There were 500 students in these courses, but to get out of the room, the professor had to walk back up through the amphitheater where he was certain to be intercepted by students. Very different from the French professors who just retreated back stage. Basically at Yale, even the great professors, would stand down front and take questions for another half an hour until the next class came in. There really is in the American educational system, at least at its best, this interaction, the challenging, and the making you think on your own.

Q: We are getting up to what, '67?

BREMER: The summer of '66.

Q: Then what?

BREMER: My father who was still in international business said, "This is the time for public service." We were in the middle of a war. As I have told you since you were young, everybody's got to do public service. You've got your education; you've got to pay your debt to the country through public service." So I went out and interviewed at the CIA, the State Department, and the Department of Commerce since I was getting a business degree. I talked to Navy intelligence, army intelligence; I did a variety of interviews and took the Foreign Service exam, the written exam. I took it in December of my second year at Harvard, passed that exam and went on and took the oral exam in Boston some months later and passed that. That helped me decide to join the Foreign Service. I had in mind that I would be in the Foreign Service for a couple of years, maybe three or four," pay my debt to society", as my father called it, and then go into business, perhaps joining him in business which I knew was his hope.

Q: This was the honey track or whatever you say. So many come in and there is something addictive about the Foreign Service.

BREMER: I got married right after I graduated and my wife who had also studied history at college shared my interest in international affairs and we never looked back. We stayed in for 23 years.

Q: Let's talk a little about the Foreign Service exam. How did you find the written exam?

BREMER: You know, I took the written exam with a friend from business school, a classmate who was an engineer. He graduated in the top 1% at the business school, so a very bright guy. We traveled to Lowell and took the exam and on the way back in the car he was saying, "Gosh that was a lot harder than I thought. They showed that picture and asked whether it was a Monet or a David or something. I hadn't the foggiest." I said, "Of course it was a Monet, it was easy to see. But the question that really bothered me was when they showed that diagram and asked, is it a molecule or an atom." I had no idea which it was. He said, "Well, of course it was a molecule." So we concluded that the exam was probably was quite fair because he was stumped by a lot of things I found easy and I didn't have a clue about the stuff he could do.

Q: How about the oral exam? How did you find it? This was sort of three on one, wasn't it?

BREMER: Three on one. I rather enjoyed it. I took it in Boston and they knew my background, obviously, so they put me in a series of situations. The one I remember was I was the French consul general in Boston and I had been asked to, I think it was to give a Fourth of July speech or do something about Lexington, I don't know. They said, "What are you going to say?"

So then I had to think on my feet as a Frenchman now thinking "what would I say?" They did a number of those, I don't remember the other ones but that one stuck in my mind. I rather enjoyed the exam.

Q: I gave that exam, I was one of the traveling people, this was in the '70s and later I think mainly because of pressure from equal rights people, the questions aren't fitted to the person.

BREMER: No, because they are not allowed to know anything about the person anymore.

Q: It's crazy but it is what happens when sort of the lawyers get into it.

BREMER: It was really rather fun and in those days they told you right away, within half an hour after the exam. I sat in some room and they came out and said "you passed".

Q: I took mine back in '54 and they said, you know, you passed.

BREMER: Yes, they told you right away.

Q: You got married before you came into the Foreign Service?

BREMER: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me something about the background of your wife?

BREMER: Francie -- Frances McKee Winfield -- was born in St. Paul a year later than me, in 1942. Her father was in international business too and then moved to St. Louis where she stayed until she was 12 when she moved to Connecticut. She attended what was then called Connecticut College for Women which was about an hour from New Haven. We met at a Dixieland concert there.

Q: Connecticut College for Women was basically part of the, I guess it wasn't 'seven sisters' but it was damn close to it. It was very much a major, major school.

BREMER: It was a good school.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service in?

BREMER: In August of '66.

Q: I assume you went to an A-100 course?

BREMER: Yes.

Q: How was it constituted and what was your impression of how you were trained and the people in it?

BREMER: I don't remember a lot of it. In those days a fairly large class -- I think there were 54 of us. It ran the gamut from two people who had no degrees from college to a couple of PhDs and a bunch of people in between. Some people had no languages, some had several languages. I remember the consular part being quite precise. I wouldn't say it was intense but it was obviously material you had to learn. There was the law, the FAM, you had to learn it.

I remember a lecture on culture by a guy named Bostain. A very amusing, informed lecture about cultural differences.

I passed my language exam in French and did reasonably well in Spanish so I was not on language probation.

I have to go back a little bit. After were married, Francie and I drove to Washington and we stopped to visit her cousin, who was teaching at Princeton. He was a retired Foreign Service Officer, Leon Poullada. Leon had been in Africa, and served as ambassador, I think to Togo. What is relevant is we spent the night with him and before dinner he showed some movies, as they would be in those days, of his time in Afghanistan. He had been an economic officer in Afghanistan in the '50s and had been James Michener's control officer when Michener traveled around collecting information for Caravans, the book. We were rather struck by these pictures of Afghanistan.

When I got in the Foreign Service and the question came, where should I ask to go, I had three principles: I wanted to go to a part of the world I had never been to before; I wanted

to go to a medium-sized embassy where I figured I would get responsibility; and I wanted to go to a developing country because I had been in Europe and had seen the developed world but I wanted to serve in a country that wasn't developed. So when the time came round for requesting my first post, I put down Kabul. The people in personnel were obviously flabbergasted. I don't think anybody had ever asked for Kabul. They obviously said, "Let's get him out of here before he can change his mind." They pulled me out of the Consular course and two weeks later we were gone. So we were very happy that we had seen Leon Poullada and seen something about Afghanistan. It fit all my requirements. It was a part of the world I hadn't been to, a medium sized post and a developing country. We wound up in Kabul rather quickly.

Q: Was Vietnam, it had to be a factor.

BREMER: It was a factor in our class because at that time the unmarried men in our class basically were assigned to Vietnam. Married officers were not at that time, in late '66, assigned to Vietnam because it was an unaccompanied tour. Some of my unmarried classmates went to Vietnam. I went to Kabul.

Q: Did you have any feelings about Vietnam? By '66 I don't think it was that controversial.

BREMER: No, it wasn't. I don't remember strong feelings about it one way or the other. It was not that controversial, as you say.

Q: Kabul, you were there from '66 to?

BREMER: We went on a two year tour but we were shortened by direct transfer two-thirds of the way through.

Q: What was Kabul like in Afghanistan at that time?

BREMER: It was a bit of a contradictory place in the sense that it was extremely primitive. On the other hand, from a political point of view, it was -- I certainly wouldn't say it was progressive -- but they had a constitutional monarch, Zahir Shah. There was a parliament, a loya jirga. Political life was constrained, obviously. But I think the thing that struck me most when we were there was how primitive it was particularly when you got outside of Kabul, you felt like nothing had changed for a thousand years, which more or less it hadn't.

Kabul was a city of three quarters of a million people in those days, the size of Washington. None of the streets had names, there were no traffic lights, and there were open sewers on the side of all of the streets. There were camels and donkeys and God knows what. One of the first impressions coming into Kabul was of people pushing cars along the streets either because they couldn't afford the gas or because the car needed repairs. So rather than have a car drive, you had "cars pushers" all over the place.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BREMER: John Steeves had just left when I got there and Robert Neumann came maybe a month after I got there. Archer Blood was chargé when I got there. I think Neumann came within a month or two.

Q: How did you find the embassy?

BREMER: From a physical point of view, we were working out of what was then called "the old embassy" which was a ramshackle compound. I was the consular officer. The fellow I was replacing got pulled out early for medical reasons and that's why they were able to assign me so quickly.

Q: Archer Blood was quite a figure. He was one of these people who challenged the system, quite appropriately, I guess, both in Bangladesh and also in Greece. How did you find him?

BREMER: I thought he was fair, tough minded but fair. I will tell you an interesting story from my first week there that has always stuck with me. I was the consular officer and I showed up for work, literally the first day, and there was an Indian consular assistant who came in and said, "Miss So and So is here to talk to you about her visa" and he gave me the file. Her husband was a student in New York, at Columbia, I think and she wanted to go visit him for Christmas. This was in November and in those days you had to fill out a form; I think it was called an I-20. You had to have permission to bring a spouse. The file showed that she did not have the form.

So I interviewed her and told her she had to get that and she said, "No" and we went back and forth a bit. She had been told this by my predecessor and she thought she'd just try the story out again and I said, "No, the law is the law. Even if I issue you a visa," she had a diplomatic passport, "even if I issue you a visa, it is quite possible the INS, which in the end has to decide to let you in, will turn you back and you will have to come all the way back to Kabul. It is really very simple. Have him send a telex -- there weren't faxes in those days -- to me whatever was needed and I can issue the visa." "No, absolutely no, not at all.'' She left and about an hour and a half later, Arch Blood the chargé sent word to come over to his office. I found this rather scary, I had only been at the post for two days. So I thought, "oh, my God. Over to the chargé's office."

When I got to his office, Blood said that "the prime minister has just been on the phone to me about his niece's visa. He says you refused to issue the visa. She wants to be with her husband at the holidays, at Christmas." I explained to the Charge that she did not have and apparently refused to get an I-20 form. I had in my memory what the FAM had told me in the consular course. "Unless she gets her husband to send a simple telex, I can't issue the visa." He said, "There's no way to issue it?" I said, "Well, there are three other officers here who have consular exequaturs [which included Blood] and anyone of you who wants to issue the visa is welcome to; but I won't issue the visa." To his credit he said, "I will tell the prime minister."

Eventually, it had a happy ending. After several more weeks of back and forth she finally got the document she needed and I issued her the visa.

It also taught me a very early lesson which is, you do what's right. I wasn't going to bend the rules for her.

Q: Ambassador Neumann, did you have much to do with him?

BREMER: Yes, he arrived several weeks later, I don't remember when. He was a good ambassador. In fact, I have always felt the Foreign Service is lucky that from time to time we have non-career ambassadors. They often bring fresh ways of thinking about foreign policy. In my experience some of them are very good and some are not -- but some Foreign Service officers are not very good either.

Q: I have to say that we have often gained expertise or knowledge that you just don't get within the Foreign Service.

BREMER: I never worked for Steeves who was an old-school Foreign Service Officer, from everything I understood and Neumann was a bit more open. He was a good ambassador.

Q: Were you a consular officer the whole time?

BREMER: No, I was on rotation. One of the reasons I wanted to go to a medium sized post was first I wanted to get responsibility. Also in those days the big and medium sized posts had the rotation program which allowed a junior officer to rotate among the four sections of an Embassy -- political, economic, administration and consular. Although I came into the Foreign Service as a commercial officer because of my background, I wanted to get exposure to the other three "cones". I was in the consular section for about five or six months. It was an interesting time to be in consular work.

Q: Looking back, did you feel having gone through Yale and the Harvard Business School, this was certainly the fancy, make a lot of money track for people. Did this bother you at all?

BREMER: No

Q: Money just didn't turn you on?

BREMER: No. I knew that public service was not a way to get rich. On the other hand, I did not intend to stay in government more than four or five years. In any case in those days, Kabul was a 25% hardship post. I think my starting salary was something like $5,000, not a lot of money but you couldn't spend it anyway, so I saved it. I got a $50 savings bond each paycheck and I put them in my drawer and put a rubber band around

them and saved. The same thing my second post which was also a hardship post. But money wasn't a big focus of mine. Savings made sense in any case.

Q: Let's stick to the consular side. This was a time when the kids were making their excursions and going on drug route and you were at the apogee of that.

BREMER: Yes, Kabul was a big stop in the drug route. A lot of young Americans would take the inexpensive Holland American Lines ships to the Netherlands. A group would buy a beat up Volkswagen and five people would drive across Turkey, across Iran, across Afghanistan. They were trying to get to Kathmandu because the drugs were supposed to be very cheap and available in Kathmandu. Actually in1966 -1967 the Nepalese government got tired of all these kids being there and pushed them across the border into India. The Indians took them and pushed them in turn back into Pakistan. The Paks took them and pushed them into Afghanistan. So we had the confluence of two streams of these kids, coming from both east and west. As the consular officer, I spent a lot of time in the jails and the flop houses trying to locate Senator So and So's constituent who hadn't been heard of since Tabriz three weeks before and trying to persuade these kids to go home. In many cases I had to do repatriation loans and fix their passports so that they could go home but nowhere else. .

One of the embarrassing aspects that we faced was some of these kids set up as beggars outside the gate of the embassy. In Islam you are supposed to give alms to beggars and these Americans were at least middle class, some of them upper middle class, or they wouldn't be there. This was one of the poorest countries in the world. It was embarrassing to have these Americans with their begging bowls outside the front of the embassy.

Q: How did you find, I assume you had to deal with them on various issues, didn't you?

BREMER: Yes. Most of the time my dealing with them had to do with figuring out how to get them home. I remember one cable from a senator, relaying a cable from a father to the girl, I think her name was Stephanie. 'Stephanie, our patience and your money have run out. It's time for you to come home.' Basically, that's what I said after I found Stephanie in a flop house. "Here's how we do it and we are going to do a repatriation loan. You are going straight home."

Sometimes we had to get them out of jail. Afghan jails were not places you would like to spend a lot of time or have your son or daughter spend a lot of time.

We also had a different consular problem which was American women marrying Afghan men who had come to the US for studies. There was a fairly large USAID program of sending Afghans to study in the United States, particularly in the southwest, agriculture, geology. Afghan men are rather handsome and American women often found them attractive. They would marry the Afghan and then they would come back to Afghanistan and two things happened: first, as soon as they landed in Kabul the Afghan government took their American passports away. They were not allowed to travel. When the

American arrived at the husband's home in the compound, she would find at least one other wife, several children and usually a mother-in-law living in the compound. It was often not a happy situation. Most of them did not speak the local language. One of the other things that the consular section had to deal with was helping these American women once they decided they wanted to leave. That meant issuing them a valid passport and helping them get out of the country legally. Some of them went illegally.

Q: How did you do that?

BREMER: Well, we could issue them passports once they could prove they were Americans and that was, of course, always a problem. Sometimes they had to get birth certificates and sometimes we could find their records. Of course, there were no computers in those days so getting records back and forth was hard.

Q: Was there a problem getting them past passport control?

BREMER: Well, usually once they had the new passport they could get out legally. Sometimes they tried to go out illegally and that became a problem. We had a case of a USAID employee who befriended one of these unhappy women and smuggled her out of the country to Pakistan in the trunk of his car. We found out about it, I think because they told somebody at the airbase in Peshawar. In those days we had an airbase in Peshawar. We found out that the Russians had found out about it.

I remember being called up to Ambassador Neumann's office. After welcoming me, he gestured me to follow him into his private bathroom. He turned on the water full blast and revealed that we had "excellent information" that the Russians had caught wind of the escapade. There was a possibility they might try to blackmail the AID employee presumably to turn him into an intelligence asset. . So we had quite a confrontation. We had to send the AID employee home. On the whole as far as I could determine, most of these unhappy American women went out legally.

Q: How about the jails? What were they for mainly and how did you deal with them?

BREMER: They were in jail largely for petty theft, usually to support their drug habits. I don't think any of them were put in jail for drugs because the drugs were so available. The most common drug in those days was hashish. I don't remember any case of heroin.

We had pretty good relations with the police and basically tried to get the Americans remanded to our custody, usually with the hope we would also be able to send them home, which in most cases we were able to do.

Q: I interviewed Ann Wright. She came into Kabul about this time on the back of a truck and the next time she went to Kabul was as chief of the political section with five people and a plane.

How was living there? How did you find, you and your wife living there?

BREMER: It was difficult -- particularly for families with small children because of the health problems. You couldn't drink the water. The embassy had a deep artesian well where you got water. You took the water home, you boiled it, and then you put halizone in it and you still got dysentery. We were required to have stool checks every two weeks for dysentery, amoebic and bacillary dysentery. I remember asking the embassy doctor what the results of these were on the whole and he said that they are 90% positive and 10% false negatives. Everybody was sick all the time.

But because it was such an alien, I would not say hostile, but alien environment, the morale at the embassy was very high. People, who could stay, stayed and really enjoyed it. We still see people, friends who were there with us.

Q: There has been for years quite a Kabul clique because of that.

As a commercial officer, besides hashish, what else?

BREMER: Well, it was interesting. I think I went first from the consular to political section but anyway, I wound up in economic/commercial for some months toward the end of my tour. We had no commercial program there and yet the Department of Commerce had these trade opportunity programs, which I had learned about, and so I decided to hit the road and travel around and see what I could do. One of the key products that I thought American companies could sell there was submersible pumps, small submersible pumps because obviously it is an arid country, although there is water down below. So I developed trade opportunities and submitted them back to the Department of Commerce. I can't say it changed the balance of payments of either country but it was fun traveling around and meeting Afghan businessmen and traders.

America's major export to Afghanistan was used clothing. The used clothing bazaar was a very big bazaar in Kabul. It was called the Kennedy Bazaar at that time. Basically it was used clothing collected by organizations in America, bundled up into big packages and sold by the pound, without regard to content, to middlemen, who then flogged it on to the bazaar merchants. Once I found a nice, but worn, tweed jacket with the name of a Yale classmate sewn in it.

Q: I remember being in Dhahran some years earlier seeing people during the winter wearing Navy great coats, German army, Russian army and then the normal, just the top of a double breasted suit.

BREMER: We had a barbershop quartet in Kabul and decided we ought to have red vests. So we trooped down to the used clothing bazaar and found four red vests in various stalls, so we got had our red vests.

Q: How about, it being your first post, was there much contact with the other embassies, young officers getting together?

BREMER: I had a good friend at the British high commission as it was called in those days, not an embassy. A few others. The most interesting diplomatic contacts in those days were with the Russians. This was 1966 – '67. It was one of the few posts in the world where there was quite a bit of regular and authorized interaction between the American and Russian diplomats, like Berlin in a way. We had an active station and the Russians had a rather active resident. Every six months or so, alternating turns, the Russians Resident would host a rather drunken brawl for the Americans; the Americas station would host the next one. This was obviously an attempt by both of our agencies to recruit, find the weak points in the other side. So there was quite a bit of contact with the Russians, which was of some interest, less so to the political section than to the station.

Other than the Brits, I don't remember spending a lot of time with other diplomats.

Q: What about with the Afghans?

BREMER: Obviously we had a lot of official contact with those in the government, the foreign ministry and in the case of consular, the police and security services. There was almost no private sector. I remember only a couple of businessmen. If you got to Kandahar or Heart or Mazar-i-Sharif or some of the other places you would see other non-official Afghans. It was mostly men; they rarely brought their wives to a dinner. One of the challenges in entertaining there was that you never knew how many people would show up.. The men might show up with one or more wives or they might show up with no wives but two cousins who were in town or they might not show up at all. You basically never knew who was going to come to dinner. So Francie and I quickly realized you never planned seated dinners -- at least not at our level.

Q: Politically, you had time in the political section, didn't you?

BREMER: I did.

Q: Did sort of the politics of Afghanistan at that time?

BREMER: In theory it was a constitutional democracy but pretty much the king and his court ran the country. I used the time in the political section to try to travel around the country a bit and see parts of Afghanistan outside of Kabul. I made trips to Kandahar, to Ghazni, to Herat, and to Jalalabad a number of times. I never got to Mazar-i-Sharif because the trip I was making there we had a terrible accident in which one of our fellow travelers was killed.

The most memorable trip I ever made in the Foreign Service was with an Afghan friend who worked at the central bank who was from a town called Juwayn. If you look at a map where Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iran come together, in the far southwest, that's were it is. This Afghan had gone to primary school in Juwayn and when he finished, his father wanted him to farm. He wanted to get more education and so he had run away, went to Kandahar. His father sent some men from Juwayn to kidnap him and take him back home. He escaped and made his way to Kabul. There he was taken under the wing

of some American missionaries. They arranged to send him to the United States for college to become an economist. After several years studying, he came back to Afghanistan and took a job in the central bank. He regularly wrote his father and sent him money, but he had never been back to Juwayn for 30 years. Together with another guy from the economic section, we drove down to this village which is the most foreboding landscape I have ever seen in my life. It's part of Baluchistan. We went to his little village with mud huts, no electricity, to see his father for the first time in 30 years. It was a very moving trip and very exciting. The most exciting news was that his father had realized the value of education, and had persuaded the local villagers to allow girls into the primary school. Believe me, in rural Afghanistan in the 1960s, this was in its own way revolutionary.

Q: What about travel there? Was it dangerous?

BREMER: Yes, it was dangerous even in Kabul because there were no traffic signs in a city of three-quarters of a million people. So you had to be pretty careful crossing roads. Outside the capital, we were competing on road construction with the Russians. We were building roads to the south; the Russians were building roads from their borders down. On those roads the Afghans, those who could drive, drove like maniacs and there was always the likelihood, not even possibility that a camel or a person would suddenly walk across in front of you. As Michener wrote in his Caravans, if you had the misfortune to have an accident and you killed an Afghan, there was a pretty good chance you would be stoned to death as had happened in one of the scenes in Caravans. We had incidents where people had serious accidents and, basically, the instructions were to leave the scene and come to the embassy right away. So it was dangerous.

Q: When I was with the board of examiners one of the things we would give was 'Afghanistan, explain the situation. Say an American comes to you. What do you do?' But then we would put them in England and the same thing would happen and some people couldn't deal with that.

With this were you getting a real taste for the Foreign Service?

BREMER: Oh, yes, Francie and I really enjoyed our time. We didn't have any children yet. I think it was harder, a much harder place to be with children because of disease, everybody was sick all the time.

Q: What about other officers in the embassy? Was this did you get together with them much?

BREMER: Yes, there was a fair amount of in house interaction and entertaining. There were also people from UNDP who were there and from some of the other embassies.

Q: UNDP is displaced person?

BREMER: No, the United Nations Development Program. It was the aid arm of the U.N.

Q: Did you get any feel for AID there, what it was doing?

BREMER: Yes, a little bit and it stuck with me. Our biggest aid project at that time was south of Kandahar in the Helmand Valley. It's become more famous now as a poppy growing area. In those days we had people from, I think, Indiana University doing advanced planting techniques for corn, for maize. It was by far the largest program in those days. The other objective of the program was to try to settle nomads, Kuchi nomads, who again who feature in Caravans. They have forever been nomads in that part of Afghanistan.

When I heard the phrase, 'settle nomads' a small alarm bell went off in the back of my mind, wondering if these people haven't settled for the last three, four thousand years, why are they going to settle now? And it didn't work very well. We built nice little houses and schools but the nomads continued to go on their nomadic way.

It struck me then that this was probably not the best way to spend taxpayers' money.

Q: Did India, Pakistan or Iran come across your radar there?

BREMER: Not Iran although when we flew to Kabul we always stopped at Tehran. India and Pakistan in this way: first of all, Pakistan because the nearest medical help, western medical help, was at the American airbase in Peshawar.

Francie and I had one memorable trip there. I woke up one day with a very sore tooth. I went to the Embassy doctor and he diagnosed an infected root canal and said, "Well, you'd better go down to Peshawar and get it fixed." That was the nearest dentist. I was in a lot of pain so he gave me some codeine. Francie had to drive and it was quite a drive in a little Volkswagen. I was lolling half asleep while she had to navigate the hair-raising Khyber Pass to Peshawar. We arrived at the base late Saturday afternoon and asked the guard where we could find the base dentists. He referred us to the Officers' Club. There we repeated the question and a first lieutenant slid off the bar stool and told us to follow him. He was two weeks out of dental school making me his first patient for anything other than cleaning teeth. I'm not sure which of us was more nervous, but it was not a happy experience for either of us.

Kabul was at the end of long supply line for furniture and furnishings. In effect the post got the castoffs from the embassy in New Delhi, desks and chairs and everything. But the Pakistan India border was closed to all but diplomatic traffic at this time. So the only way to get those materials up to Kabul was to have a diplomat escort the Embassy trucks across the border to Delhi and back. So every three months the Embassy ran a convoy of three large trucks down to New Delhi. My wife and I were asked to escort one of these convoys in the summer of '67. We rode in the three trucks with our Embassy Afghan drivers, to New Delhi, picked up a whole bunch of furniture and drove it back to Kabul.

The political impact of the broader region while we were in Kabul was the Six Day Mideast War. We had a lot of anti-American demonstrations in Kabul. They were not very rough, mostly just noisy. And then we had evacuees out of the Middle Eastern Embassies who came to work in Kabul, Foreign Service officers who had been evacuated from their posts in the Middle East.

Q: Jerry, there are two things before we finish with Afghanistan. In the first place you were in Afghanistan from when to when?

BREMER: 1966 to 1968.

Q: You wanted to mention the Harriman visit and I take it this is a fairly important visit.

BREMER: In substance it was not important. Averill Harriman was a special envoy for President Johnson on Vietnam. This was probably was in mid '67. He came into town as part of a trip to Asia to try to shore up support for our position in Vietnam. What was interesting to me was the preparations. It was the first time I had seen a high level visit. He had people from the executive secretariat supporting him with trunk loads of classified material. He rushed off in a motorcade to see the king. It made an impression on me about the effort and work that had to go into a short high level visit like this which came back later in my next assignment. When I was finishing my next assignment, in Africa, somebody suggested to me that for my first Washington assignment I ought to think about working in the executive secretariat, and then I remembered all these people rushing around. In terms of substance, I have no idea what came from the visit itself.

Q: You also mentioned the crown prince but also the role of the royal family at that time.

BREMER: In the early '60s the King ruled in what amounted to a constitutional monarchy. He was the head of state. There was a loya jirga, a parliament of sorts which met and debated issues, but with little obvious power. He was still running the show but on a more or less moderate basis. For example, Zahir Shah was in favor of educating women. In western terms he was a moderate monarch.

Q: Did he have a background? Had he been educated in England or anything like that or was it pretty much came out of the

BREMER: I can't remember what his immediate family history was. He was from the ruling Pathan Durrani tribe that the British in 1888 had chosen to run the place after they had been beaten a second time in a war. They basically went and found a Pathan tribal chief, gave him a sack of gold and said, "Sort these guys out, will you and we will call you king." There had been internal tribal coup back in 1929, very complicated. They were certainly from the ruling Pathan class. I shook his hand once; I was after all the 'juniorest' of the junior officers. I didn't see king often.

Q: You mentioned a crown prince. Was he a figure at that time?

BREMER: Well, we didn't know. I wound up being his contact at the embassy by virtue of the fact that I was about his age. He was maybe a couple of years older and I spoke fluent French. In Afghanistan at that time the second language among many upper class people was French because the French had established the first school, Esteqlal, back in 1906. A lot of the civil servants at the higher level and as it happened the royal family had as their second language French.

Some intermediary -- at this point I can't remember who it was -- suggested that I meet the crown prince. I checked with the ambassador and the political section about this because it was obviously way above my pay grade. They encouraged me to go ahead because the USG would want to know more about someone who might some day become King.

Francie and I had the Crown Prince to dinner a couple of times at our house He was well polished and charming, brought his wife. They had a couple of kids, as I recall.

There is one other story about the Crown Prince. A couple of us New Englanders at the Embassy had found a way to set up a ski tow south of Kabul on the road to Ghazni. We got an old unused truck from AID which we jacked up on its rear axle. We ran a rope around the rim to create an old New England style rope tow. The Crown Prince told me he wanted to come and ski.

So on the appointed day, we met at the "ski area", a smallish hill off the Kabul-Ghazni road. I have a lasting memory of the day. Instantly it was clear that my briefing on the proper use of a rope tow had been grossly inadequate. For the Prince, with a wave and gay smile, bent down and firmly grabbed the fast-moving rope. He was immediately lifted off his feet and dragged up the hill.

I watched, transfixed with horror as he was pulled along in an ever growing cloud of snow, out of which appeared an occasional arm or leg. As it progressed up the hill, the cloud of snow spewed out one ski pole to the left, another to the right. A glove, a pair of goggles, one ski and the Prince's bright red hat were left in his wake. Watching this ghastly sight, it occurred to me that the incident was unlikely to prove career-enhancing: the State Department could hardly be expected to overlook the diplomatic consequences if one of its officers had killed off the Crown Prince of a nation with which, at least until recently, America had enjoyed good relations.

Fortunately one of the other club members turned off the tow. The Prince, now two thirds of the way up the mountain, rather gamely staggered to his feet. Something in his expression convinced me that it would not be prudent to suggest he have another go at the rope tow. Anyway, he survived.

One of the problems with the royal family was they more or less considered themselves above the law. For example, AID paved the road from Kabul down to Kandahar. Before the road was opened, the king used to go out and run one of his Mercedes a hundred and twenty miles an hour down this road just to see how the road went and how his car went.

The crown prince during the time we were there was never much of a political factor; in fact, I don't think he ever became a political factor. They threw the king out in 1973. The Crown Prince now lives in quiet exile in the US.

I should say one other thing about the loya jirga, about the political situation because it was important later in Afghanistan. There were two deputies in the loya jirga who were declared communist. One of them was Babrak Karmal. At some point, it may have been after the coup -- it was after we left anyway, -- he exiled himself off to one of the Soviet satellites, I can't remember which one. There in effect Russians kept him in reserve. They sent him back in after the coup in 1978 to be a leader in Afghanistan. So there was already at the time we were there, quite a lot of, one would call it, peaceful competition between us and the Russians in Afghanistan about who built which roads, who did what. But the Russians were apparently already planning ahead.

Q: Actually wasn't there a certain amount of sitting together and lining out to make sure you got your roads meeting at the right place and that sort of thing?

BREMER: The Russians built the road from the northern border, Amu Darya River, down to Kabul and we built the road from Kabul down to Kandahar and then there was a question about the road out to Herat on the other side. We also worked on the road going out to Jalalabad to the east. We used to joke before it turned out to be not at all funny, about how the Russians had built the road from the north down to Kabul so that they could invade Afghanistan. At the time this was sort of a fantasy. This turned out to be unfortunately true in the late '70s.

In the '60s as we discussed earlier, Kabul was one of the few posts where American and Russian diplomats had regular, approved contact. There was Berlin and a little bit in Vienna and Warsaw. Today in the early 21st century we forget that before détente American and Russian diplomats did not regularly visit each other.

Q: You left there in 1968?

BREMER: In the summer of 1968. I was called up to the DCM's office about four months before our tour was due to end and handed a telegram that said, 'TM4 Bremer report to Blantyre in two weeks.' So I asked Arch Blood, the DCM, "What does this mean" He explained that it was "travel message" which said we were to take a "direct transfer" to the post in Blantyre, due there in two weeks. "Well", I wondered, "where is Blantyre?" and he said, "Damned if I know. Sounds kind of English." We looked it up in the list of Foreign Service posts and found it was in a place called Malawi which neither of us had heard of. "OK. So where's Malawi?" He replied that he didn't know either, but perhaps it was in Africa. Well we looked at the globe in his office and couldn't find any Malawi in Africa or anywhere else. So on a hunch, because Blantyre sounded kind of English, I called a friend at the British high commission and asked him, "Have you ever heard of a place called Blantyre?" He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I am supposed to be there in two weeks and I don't even know where it is." He said that it was the capital of

what used to be called Nyasaland in the federation of Rhodesia. Since Malawi had become independent only in 1964, the DCM's globe had it marked as "Nyasaland" -- which at least solved the mystery of where we were headed.

Francie and I then went through one of those rushed routines of packing out and saying our farewells. The Embassy Admin people had to figure out how to get us and our household effects from Kabul to Blantyre. We broke our backs, we got to Blantyre, arrived there about ten days later. The DCM met me at the airport and his first words were, "What the hell are you doing here? We didn't expect you for a few more weeks." It turned out that the man I was to replace was still at post. I decided that was the last time I would pay attention to TM4 orders.

Q: This is a Foreign Service story that is repeated again and again.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BREMER: We were there from the summer of '68 to the early spring of '71, just about three years.

Q: Let's talk about Malawi. What's its background, what was going on there at the time?

BREMER: Malawi, in Central Africa, had been a British colony until 1964 when it became independent in the rush of decolonization in Africa. It was being run then and for some years afterwards by Dr. Kamuzu Banda, a British educated medical doctor who came back to become the great independence leader of Malawi. Malawi in those days was a country of about five million people, at the time was one of the most heavily populated places on earth, I think second only to Hong Kong in terms of people per square mile; a small country It is the place where Livingston made his name and Blantyre is the name of a Scottish city.

Q: Why did it have so many people in there?

BREMER: Well, it's fertile country. Then there was the fact that Banda, although he was a medical doctor, simply did not believe in family planning. He wanted to build his population as much as possible and encouraged people to have as many babies as possible. Perhaps 90% of the people are in agriculture. Maybe more. So there was the natural desire to have more hands to work the fields. Banda was encouraging a bigger population and so the population was growing very fast. . Among other jobs, I was the post's population, or "family planning officer" or whatever it was called which was a thankless task. It never got off the ground.

Q: Were we, the United States at all interested in Malawi?

BREMER: Not that I could discern, though there were two aspects of Malawi that perhaps had some relevance. First of all, Malawi was at that time the only country in Africa that had relations with Taiwan which in those years America still recognized as

the government of China. Taiwan had an Embassy there and was helping the Malawians establish something called Young Pioneers, like Boy Scouts. While we were there Banda became the first and only country in sub-Saharan Africa to establish relations with South Africa. One of the big events while we were there was a visit by then President Vorster to Malawi. It was the first time, I think, a South African president had been able to visit another African country. This did not endear Banda to other African Chiefs of State.

There is an interesting angle to that. When Banda was young, about 11 or 12, like many Malawians he left the country to work in the mines in South Africa. This is in the early part of the 20th century, probably around 1915. He walked there as Malawians did then and probably still do. When he was working in the mines as a teenager, an American Baptist missionary group offered him to send him to the United States for his education, where he went to college. Eventually he went to medical school in Britain.

Banda used to tell Americans his story, particularly American congressmen, black American congressmen who visited and were often outspokenly critical of his relations with South Africa. I remember hearing him tell these people how he had walked to South Africa and come to the US for school. "Look, when I was your age, Congressman, I went to school in the United States and I saw black men lynched at the school I was at and now, forty years later, I see what progress has been made in your country." This was after the Civil Rights Act had been signed in the United States. "I see that progress has been made, that whites and blacks can get along in the United States and who is to say," He would also add "who is to say that forty years from now blacks and whites can't get along in South Africa? Shouldn't we encourage this direction?"

In terms of American interests, I would say that I never found it a very compelling reason to have an embassy there. We did need a consular agent because there were about 750 Americans in the country, most of them missionaries from various denominations. Obviously, we had an obligation to look after them. Very few Malawians traveled to the United States so it wasn't as if it was a visa mill. It was a hard argument to make, in my view, that we needed an embassy there. I reached this conclusion early on and to show how incompletely I understood the mores of the Foreign Service, I committed this conclusion to writing in a memo to the DCM. The deafening silence from the "Front Office" sent a clear message.

Q: I think of a famous trip of in the early 60s. An Undersecretary traveled to Africa and he went to a couple of places and this one when things were beginning to get ready to open up and he made the decision we were going to have an embassy.

BREMER: It was a political decision. I felt as a taxpayer, it was really open to question. I could see no compelling national reason why we needed an embassy in every country and I certainly, after three years there, could not make the argument for one in Malawi.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

BREMER: Marshall Jones, who was a career diplomat. He'd been in the administrative cone and was our ambassador there. Bill Barnsdall was the deputy. Actually, in many ways it was the most fun job I had in the Foreign Service because the ambassador did whatever ambassadors did. -- I never could really figure that out, even after having been an ambassador. We had closed our AID mission and moved its responsibilities to a regional office in Zambia. So the DCM occupied himself largely by overseeing the residual AID programs which involved self-help money and a few leftover projects. And there was an administrative officer. So that made me the consular officer, the economic, the political, commercial officer. It was a great job.

Q: What were the Malawians like?

BREMER: Well, they were very different from the Afghans. They were much more outgoing and less reserved than the Afghans. Perhaps they were that way because the climate was more benign than in Afghanistan. The sub-Saharan African climate of Malawi has a fair degree of altitude; it's on the Rift Valley so it wasn't at all tropical except in the south. So the Malawians weren't going to starve to death which you could easily see happening in Afghanistan with very rough topography.

We had good Malawian friends; they were easier to get to know, to have to your house to dinner than the Afghans had been.

Q: Did the Malawians play a role in Central Africa? Some of these African nations have people who ended up as merchants or civil servants or what have you.

BREMER: The Malawian economy was and is almost entirely agricultural. When we were there, its main export crops were tobacco and tea, both of which were sold basically to the London market. When they had been colonists, the British had established both of those industries. But most of the Malawians were on a subsistence economy growing maize, cassava and cotton. The Malawians tended to export people to South Africa to work in the mines as they had done for a hundred years. It was and is a very poor country.

Q: Were the British sort of the predominant embassy there?

BREMER: Yes, the British still had a very strong residual presence. They ran the security forces, the guy in charge of the army, the guy in charge of the police; these were professional British officers seconded to the Malawians. They had advisers to the president in the capital which at that time was in Zomba and they were certainly the predominant factor.

Q: Were there any external threats there of any other powers or were the South Africans messing around?

BREMER: No. The main threat, which was just a very small threat on the horizon at that time, that became a big threat, was the insurgency in Mozambique against the

Portuguese; Mozambique was still a Portuguese colony and FRELIMO (Liberation Front of Mozambique), the independence movement, was operating mostly in the northern part of Mozambique and there was occasional spillover into Malawi. It became much more serious after we left. Banda was pretty strict. He didn't want to have these FRELIMO guys operating in Malawi so he did his best to keep them out.

Q: While you were doing this while you were there, the civil rights movement was an ongoing thing. How did that, you mentioned Banda was familiar with that. Was that something that we were sort of showing what we were trying to do or not or was that a theme?

BREMER: No, it was not a particular theme.

Q: You are in Africa and this was the time, the '60s was the era of the discovery of Africa by the United States and particularly the State Department. Did you feel attracted to Africa or not?

BREMER: Francie and I liked it a lot. We liked the people a lot and as I said they were easier to get to know than the Afghans. We enjoyed our time there; it was a fun post for us. I didn't feel one way or the other about whether I was going to make my career in Africa. I did not have the idea that by joining the Foreign Service I was making effectively a choice to be a missionary. If you want to be a missionary, be a missionary. We were there to help advance American interests and I just didn't find that American interests in Malawi were very compelling.

Q: What about Vietnam going hot and heavy while you were there? How did you feel about that?

BREMER: It didn't really feature in the discussions with the Malawians. The government of Malawi tended to be supportive of the United States in places like the U.N. when votes came up. Malawi was a very poor country and they pretty much concentrated on trying to develop themselves, in a misguided way, because of Banda's attitude towards population.

We had a pretty substantial Peace Corps group there as we had in Afghanistan. Francie and I had a Landrover, and we often went "up country" to visit the Peace Corps volunteers, which we enjoyed a lot. There was a lot of anti-war feeling among volunteers which wasn't too surprising. It wasn't an issue with the Malawians though.

Q: How about with you? Did you have any feelings?

BREMER: I didn't have strong feelings about the war. . If I were asked I would say I supported what we were trying to do in Vietnam and I felt much more strongly about that later when I came back to Washington and got more involved in it. In Afghanistan it did not intrude much either. As we discussed earlier the '67 Middle East war tended to be much more on the front line than Vietnam.

Q: After this what you might almost call a parenthesis in your career, you certainly got exposed to all the economic, political, consular and administrative side of things. You came back to Washington?

BREMER: Yes, I mentioned earlier about the Harriman visit to Kabul. I hadn't served any time in Washington. We'd been moved very quickly through the junior officer course and sent off to Kabul. I really had no idea what I wanted to do in Washington but another American diplomat said to me, while we were still in Malawi, "You know, you ought to think about working in the operations center and the secretariat. There you can really get a good quick overview of how the Department works." So I wrote a letter to somebody -- maybe the director of personnel -- and said that I would like to apply for a job in the operations center. To my surprise when my tour was over, I got orders to report to the operations center. So that's in a way how the Harriman visit influenced where I wound up.

Toward the end of our tour, Francie got pregnant and flew home to have our son born in Connecticut because she was RH negative and we didn't trust the Malawian health services to deal with that. Also she got malaria twice during our tour there, which was probably the cause of the fibromyalgia which she still suffers from.

Q: So you were in that operation center from when to when?

BREMER: We came back from Africa in early 1971. I spent very little time in the operations center initially because I was almost immediately seconded over to the National Military Command Center(NMCC). In those days -- I don't know if it is still the case -- we had a State Department representative in the NMCC and there was a DOD rep in the Ops Center at State. I spent a few weeks in the Ops Center, and then four or five months over at the NMCC. Then I came back to the Ops Center. So the total time in the operations center was about a year, maybe a little less than a year.

Q: We'll move to the operations center but first this military center. What were you doing and what was happening at the time?

BREMER: The NMCC is in effect the Pentagon's equivalent operations center – a 24 hour watch center with representatives from all the services, from the Joint Chiefs and from the CIA, State Department -- I can't remember who else was there, maybe the Justice Department. We were there to provide liaison on issues that might arise in the middle of the night or the middle of the day that had a diplomatic, political aspect to them. For example, one night there was an incident, I think it involved some Central Americans, as I recall they were Hondurans. They were on a small ship, or a boat and for some reason an American Navy ship fired on them. Several of those Hondurans got badly burned and SOUTHCOM, the command in Panama, was trying to figure out what to do with these guys. We had injured them in international waters and the military at the NMCC came to me with the idea that they were just going to take them back to where they came from. I said, "No, you really have a diplomatic problem on your hands here." Several of them had been badly burned due to our actions. Working with the Pentagon

folks and talking back to State on the telephone, we were able to persuade the military that we had an obligation to help these people and take them to the burn center in Brownsville, Texas. These guys didn't have passports, didn't have visas.

Q: When it makes sense, it is usually almost impossible to do.

BREMER: Anyway, we got them there and that worked out.

Another event that happened on my watch one night, I think it was a Saturday night. I could tell that there was considerable tension and dismay in the room. The flap was that the NMCC had just heard about the pending publication the next day of the Pentagon Papers. I started nosing around with some captains and majors to find out what the uproar was about.

Q: Explain what the Pentagon Papers were.

BREMER: This was a series of papers relating to the Vietnam War that were published, I think first in the New York Times, on a Sunday morning in the middle of the War, revealing a lot of the U.S. internal deliberations about Vietnam particularly under Johnson; there may have been some Kennedy stuff. It caused quite a flap. I was standing the evening watch -- the 4 to midnight watch -- and there was a lot of commotion. The Pentagon had just learned the papers were coming out the next day. I was able to alert the ops center. I don't know what happened from there. I presume they told the secretary if he didn't already know which I presume he did.

Q: Particularly Washington being such a political town, this sent tremors throughout the town.

BREMER: As the State Department representative over at DOD, you had first an obligation to try to deal with the political or diplomatic aspects of events which might not be apparent to the military. We were in the middle of a war, after all. We were doing very heavy bombing, 'rolling thunder' was the name of the bombing campaign, B-52 raids over North Vietnam at that time, There were a lot of other things happening around the world. To a degree if DOD needed help or advise on political and diplomatic issues you were at least the first point of liaison to State especially in the night. You didn't necessarily solve it but you'd plug them in to somebody at State.

And then of course, you were effectively a distant early warning post for the State Department on things going on, like the Pentagon Papers.

Q: How did you find working there as a Foreign Service officer with the military? Did they have an attitude towards you; did you have an attitude towards them?

BREMER: At this distance it is a little hard to remember. I had a lot of respect for them, for what they were trying to do. I think that the political/military nexus is always a complicated one. As I also experienced in Iraq, the political and military people

understandably approach matters from a different perspective and a different set of ideas and principles. It is always complicated to make that connection. I can't say that this was a big problem for me when I was there or in the ops center. At this time there was a 'milrep' in the operations center who was a representative of the NMMC, 24 hours a day. We often used him to liaise on matters involving the military.

Q: Then you moved over to the ops center.

BREMER: Then I came back to the ops center as an assistant watch officer for a month or two. Then I was transferred to what was then called, and may still be called, "the line". This is the secretariat staff, a small group of FSOs, 6 or 8, effectively serving as the common staff to all the principals, in those days not just the secretary but to the deputy secretary and the under secretaries.

In early '72 my first big assignment was preparing the briefing papers for President Nixon's visit to Russia which was in May. This was the first visit b a sitting American president to Russia since the war and obviously, a major diplomatic move. So a massive amount of paper had to be pulled together into briefing books from virtually all over the State Department. I am not sure any of the papers ever got read by anybody other than me, but anyway it was a challenge to pull it all together in a timely and reasonable coherent fashion.

Q: But Nixon studied.

BREMER: He did, but I just don't know that he read the State Department books. He knew what he was doing,. Our job was to get the papers reflecting the Department's views on all matter of policies and issues and ship them over to the White House.

Q: Were you picking up anything both in the Pentagon and also in the ops center about feelings towards Vietnam at that time? We were getting our troops out at the time.

BREMER: Actually by '71 we were already drawing down. At that period in '71 and '72, it was a very ambiguous situation in Vietnam. We'd had the Tet Offensive in '68 which had been portrayed as a defeat for America. Whereas if you looked at it from a military point of view, it was the Viet Cong that lost. But the political impact in America was the important result -- declining support for the war.

Q: The Viet Cong was basically eliminated for the rest of the war.

BREMER: Then you had the major troop movements by the regular North Vietnamese troops. I would say the overall military situation in early '72 was still ambivalent We were still conducting large bombing raids still in '72. It was hard to draw any conclusion. I was not working on Asia at that time; I was working on Europe, which is why I got the assignment to do the preparations for the Nixon visit to Moscow. Obviously it was an issue to talk to the Russians about. And the Kissinger visit to China had taken place in 1971.

Q: You are sort of the new boy on the block in Washington and all that. Did you get any feel for how the State Department worked at that time with the Nixon administration?

BREMER: A little bit. There were stories in the press about Kissinger and his relationship with Bill Rogers, at that time Secretary of State, and how the State Department had been dealt lower in the chain. I accompanied Secretary Rogers and the President to Moscow in May. After that, Rogers asked me to join his staff as special assistant so I moved from the secretariat staff to work directly for him. Of course, in the secretary's office you got more of a sense of the tension between State and the NSC. There were the problems of what Kissinger was doing. I think it was during the Moscow visit that Kissinger held his first on the record press conference and that, of course, put him in a directly competitive status with the secretary. It was one thing if he was doing back-grounding or talking to journalists off the record. But it was quite another thing that he was doing things actually on the record sessions.

Q: I interviewed Warren Zimmermann and Warren was working as sort of speech writer to Rogers and Rogers told him right away, he said, "The main thing is I don't want you to get headlines for me." Of course, Kissinger operated in a completely different way.

Going back to the trip to Moscow, what were you doing?

BREMER: This was basically more or less what I had seen of that Harriman visit while in Kabul. The secretariat staff traditionally accompanied the secretary of state on his trips, prepared him, read and screened his cables, worked on memoranda, helped him organize his briefing materials during a trip. So that's what we were doing. I don't remember how many of us there were on the trip; there were probably four or five of us from the secretariat staff because it was a 24 hour a day operation keeping Rogers up to speed on what was going on in Moscow, and around the world while he tended to immediate issues being addressed at the Moscow Summit . Now, again, since we were at the bottom of the well looking up, I don't know how much of all the work we did actually mattered. But, anyway, we were there beavering away day and night.

Q: What was your impression of Rogers?

BREMER: He was a very nice, genteel man and as I think back on it, essentially misplaced. He had been a deputy attorney general in the Eisenhower administration. He was a big corporate lawyer from New York and probably was better suited to being an attorney general than secretary of state. He did not have any particular expertise in foreign policy and was clearly outclassed by Kissinger in terms of his bureaucratic abilities. I don't blame him. Nixon made very clear that he distrusted the State Department and wanted to control foreign policy himself. So he used Kissinger to that effect which is certainly the President's prerogative. So even if Rogers had been a real foreign policy expert working hard, I am not sure it would have mattered because, in the end, it is the president who decides the set up.

I remember one day when I was his special assistant, Rogers came back from the White House and called me in and asked me to get someone from the legal adviser's office up for a debriefing of his meeting with the President. We got a lawyer up and Rogers said, "The president has asked me to have you draft legislation abolishing the Foreign Service and I need it on my desk by tomorrow night." The event made a big impression on me. Apparently some unmentioned new "outrage" had been attributed by the President to the "striped pants" crowd and he decided he didn't need our advice any longer

I have told the story many times to Foreign Service officers. It showed me that the Foreign Service has a constituency of one and that is the president. If the president doesn't want and respect or feels he needs the Foreign Service, the Foreign Service is pretty much out of business. Obviously, this legislation was never drafted; the whole thing went away as it often did with Nixon. He had an impulse and said, "Do this" and then people let him cool off.

But it made a big impression on me. It showed me how thin the thread is by which the Foreign Service hangs.

Q: It is interesting because actually Nixon in my interviews, people who dealt with Nixon were, thought quite highly of him. He and George Bush, Senior, are probably the two I would say considered by the majority of the Foreign Service who served at that time as being the two most savvy diplomats.

BREMER: There's no question that Nixon understood foreign policy, probably better than any president in the 20th century except Truman. He was good. My interaction with him was pretty modest when I was in the Foreign Service. I saw him more after he resigned. He clearly knew his stuff and Kissinger produced very high quality materials for Nixon. It just happened that Nixon had a suspicion of the Foreign Service, coming I guess from his time as vice president; I don't know where it came from. He clearly thought he did not need the State Department until he moved Kissinger over in '73.

Q: A troubled relationship there.

As assistant to the secretary of state, did, were you monitoring telephone calls and that sort of thing and making notes?

BREMER: No, we weren't monitoring phone calls, at least I wasn't, and Rogers didn't have a system. He did have an executive assistant, Maggie Runkle, who I believe listened on a number of his calls, essentially for action items. If he said to a caller "I'll do this" or "I'll do that" she'd make a note of it and then tell us and we would tell the people in the secretariat to send a paper up, say, on the Cuba embargo. Let's get it by 5 o'clock.

Q: This is one of the things that is often misunderstood by people outside the business. You know, you have somebody listening to your telephone call and they think, oh, this is eavesdropping. This is business over the telephone and you can't expect the high and

mighty, the secretary of state to make notes of doing this and somebody has to say, "OK, you promised this and we have to do that." It is part of the machinery.

BREMER: Absolutely and a vital part of the machinery because otherwise it doesn't get done. Maggie listened to be sure we had follow up to his calls.

Q: Did you find yourself going around chasing people and saying, "The secretary needs this" or that type of thing?

BREMER: Yes, of course. When you are in one of those staff jobs your job is to try to mobilize the building to support the secretary. It's the job of the secretariat to mobilize the building to support all of the principals. That can be pretty uncomfortable particularly when you are a very junior officer and you are talking to an assistant secretary who has been in the Foreign Service for 25 years and rightly considers that he knows better than you do. On the other hand, you have to say, "Yeah, well, but this is what the secretary wants" and argue with him. "He said he wants a memo on that by 6 o'clock tonight, so you will just have to get the memo up here."

Of course, when Rogers was secretary, the secretariat was the main enforcer of that process. The role of the secretariat tends to ebb and flow depending on how the secretary organizes himself. It was quite different when Kissinger came over. But under Rogers, the secretariat really took the main brunt of enforcing the secretary's and other principals' needs.

Q: You did this, how long were you doing this?

BREMER: I worked for Rogers for about a year and a half. He resigned in September of '73 and Kissinger came over from the White House as secretary of state and national security adviser for about a year. He was double-hatted for a little more than a year.

Q: What was the feeling at the time that the Rogers resigned? Was the feeling that he had been shunted aside or defeated?

BREMER: I think there was a sense that he had lost out on the bureaucratic battle with Kissinger, particularly when Kissinger replaced him. When Kissinger came over he had initially a pretty steep hill to climb to get the Foreign Service on his side. He brought with him a number of people who had worked for him over at the NSC, some of them Foreign Service officers like Larry Eagleburger, some of whom were not, like Hal Sonnenfeldt who came as his counselor. I think it took a while for Kissinger to really get hold of the Foreign Service.

I told Kissinger when he came over, I was pretty tired. I had been doing this for two and a half years and you get kind of burned out. He asked me to stay on a little while. I said, "OK, I will stay on a little while but then I really need to move on to something else." By this time I had one young child and another one coming and Francie started saying "You know, you need to move on" So I told Kissinger that I would stay on briefly and then

transition to something else. I had no particular assignment in mind, just something with a less frantic pace. The trouble was that two weeks after Kissinger arrived, the Yom Kippur War broke out in the Middle East.

Q: This was '72.

BREMER: No, October, '73. So much for my leaving. And if I thought I had worked hard before, that time looked like a picnic compared to the next years. We basically didn't look up for another three years. I think the war was in a way what forged Kissinger's relation with the Foreign Service. He wound up relying very heavily on Foreign Service officers, still had a few people he brought with him from the White House who were Middle East experts like Hal Saunders. But he suddenly found he needed people like Joe Sisco and Roy Atherton who could help him. On their side, they recognized he could get things done because of his understanding of the President and his policies.

Under Rogers, very often whatever State proposed got either modified at the White House or turned down. In Kissinger, because he was so close to the president, the Department suddenly had a real channel to the President. In the last quarter of '73 with the Yom Kipper War and the oil embargo, lots of related problems, these events began to forge a relationship between Kissinger and the career service.

Q: So you stayed another three?

BREMER: I stayed until early '76.

Q: What were you doing with Kissinger?

BREMER: I was his special assistant and eventually his chief of staff. I replaced Larry Eagleburger. Larry moved from being chief of staff to being under secretary for management and I became Kissinger's chief of staff.

Kissinger operated in a way that in effect downgraded the secretariat's role as an organization. He moved most of that kind of coordination of the State Department into his own office. He wanted tighter control over everything and he certainly exercised very tight control of the State Department.

Q: Initially, how did you find working with Kissinger and how did it develop?

BREMER: Well, he's a very difficult man to work for. He is extremely demanding. There are a lot of stories about that. He worked very hard. In a way, it was another lesson that I take from my time in Washington. I have never seen anybody get ahead in this town who doesn't work hard. You cannot be an effective top official in the American government and work 9 – 5; it just doesn't work. This became clear when Ed Muskie was secretary whom I worked when he became secretary. He liked to work from 10 – 5 or what FSOs privately called "senator's hours".

Henry worked really hard, long hours, demanded a great deal of his staff, much more than anybody thought they could produce, both those people on his immediate staff but particularly the State Department.

Q: 6th floor?

BREMER: As a result of his demanding standards, Henry was able to assemble a very strong "6th floor" team at the assistant secretary level. By most people's analysis, it was the strongest group of assistant secretaries since Dulles had been secretary. Most of them were career Foreign Service officers and he worked them to death. None of them ever complained about not seeing enough of the secretary. He really worked them. It persuaded me that when it is challenged and pushed, the Foreign Service is the best group of people in the U.S. government. They can produce enormously well, but when they are not pushed they tend to fall back to a rather "get-along-down-here-on-the-sixth-floor" approach and "let's not bother those top guys on the seventh floor with our problems. We'll cut little deals on our own among ourselves."

Henry was on to that. He would say, "No, that issue belongs up here with me. I want to decide that. I don't want you, assistant secretary for Europe, making a deal on an important policy matter with the assistant secretary from Near East about something without my knowing about it."

Every day, every assistant secretary had to write a one page memorandum to Kissinger of what he or she had done that day. There were 23 or 24 of them. Moreover every other principal of the Department, the deputy, the under secretaries, wrote a similar memo to Kissinger every day. When he traveled, those memos came by cable, every day. One of the things we did on the staff was read them and decide what was of interest to him that he should see. It was a mechanism of over watch of the Department which only a megalomaniac like Henry who worked that hard could actually do, but it worked.

Q: How did, I have a long interview with Winston Lord, how did he fit into this?

BREMER: Winston was very close to Henry. He had been with him at the White House. He came over as director of policy planning and in terms of Henry's strategic approach to the world, grand strategy, Winston was certainly one of his closest advisers. He also was the main speech writer.

Kissinger had the view that speech giving by the secretary of state is the way you move policy, which was news to me, I hadn't figured it out. You move policy by what you say publicly as secretary of state. So writing a speech for Kissinger was a major policy matter. He would say to the staff including Winston, "I am going to give a speech on food policy at the FAO conference in Rome in six weeks and I want to do the following four things" and all four of them were new policy. The way you got that done was not by writing a memo to the president -- well, sometimes you did -- but the other way was you circulated drafts of the speech and the people at the Department of Agriculture would

say, "No, no, no. You can't say that at the FAO because this is the current policy." Kissinger would say, "Well, I think we ought to move the policy." Anyway, he used speeches as a way to move policy forward in a way I think few secretaries before or since have done. So speechwriting was more than just writing putting words on paper; it became a way to make policy.

Q: Did you get any feel for Kissinger and Nixon, the relationship there?

BREMER: Not a great deal. I had a sense of a mostly respectful rivalry. They both considered themselves -- and certainly were -- experts on foreign policy. They were both realists, they both saw the world the same way. Nixon, as many people have written, had a rather inward-looking personality, I guess is one way to put it. I think he often found it very hard, particularly after the China opening, that Kissinger became such a star which certainly wasn't Nixon. He was never going to be a star. So there was a certain jealousy there.

Kissinger was respectful of the president, both because he occupied the office and I think he understood that the president saw the world largely as he did and he could work with him. But it was an up and down relationship.

Q: Did you get any feel for the role of say, Congress and all because here you had Kissinger who was an anathema apparently to some of the Republican right wing of the Republican party. They could hardly wait till they had a chance to knock him down after Nixon left.

BREMER: Certainly for the first year or so, the problem was less with the right than with the left because Vietnam was still going on. Senator William Fulbright was chairman of the senate Foreign Relations Committee and as I recall most of the issues raised at that time were related to Vietnam. The Congress, in the summer of '73, had cut off funding for our military operations in Vietnam. We were drawing out troops by then. I don't remember the right being a problem until later, until maybe '74, '75.

Senator Jesse Helms and Senator Scoop Jackson, a Democrat, had problems with the détente policy towards the Soviet Union. They believed we should confront the Soviets and that the idea of having some kind of cooperative relationship with the communists and Moscow was wrong-headed. And, of course, some of them were very upset with the opening to China which many on the right considered a betrayal of our old allies, the KMT in Taiwan.

Q: Where were you when the opening to China came about? This was before Kissinger became secretary of state.

BREMER: I was working for Rogers at that time. I think his trip was in'71, I don't remember exactly.

Q: How did that hit you all?

BREMER: I did not know about it ahead, of course. I assume Rogers did. I was stunned by the trip as most people were. I saw the opportunity presented by the opening to China, an opportunity to use the Chinese to bring some pressure on the Vietnamese where we were still in the war and as a counter balance to the Russians to try to make the Russians pay a little more attention. I saw it as a part of the chess game of national security policy. So once I got over my shock, I thought it was a good move.

Q: I think most of us in the Foreign Service felt it was about time. There is this peculiar thing that you don't talk to people you don't agree with or something.

BREMER: Yes but this was difficult and complicated because of the long time war-time relationship with the KMT in Taiwan. This was not an easy thing for Nixon to do. This wasn't just "let's talk"; this was a major strategic move on the global chess board -- obviously one of the more important of the later 20th century.

Q: Were you getting any feel for the Kissinger Dobrynin relationship? He was the Soviet ambassador for many years here.

BREMER: Yes. While he was at the NSC Kissinger had established a very close relationship with two ambassadors: Dobrynin and Simcha Dinitz who was the ambassador of Israel. Particularly after the Yom Kippur War broke out in October of '73, Dinitz was a regular visitor and Kissinger talked to each them very often on the telephone. When either of them came to call on Kissinger, the Secretary arranged each Ambassador could drive into the basement and park in the basement. In those days there wasn't as much security but you still had to have special permission to get in. So when Dobrynin or Dinitz was coming, somebody on our staff would go down and tell the guards to let the Ambassador's car in. He would then use the secretary's private elevator to arrive directly at the Secretary's office suite on the 7th floor. It wasn't a stupid practice because visits could be done without the press knowing. It became a controversial issue when Kissinger left office in early 1977.

I think that Secretary Vance or somebody on his staff made a big thing about the fact Dobrynin would have to park out front like anybody else. I could understand this but it did mean when Dobrynin came, it was a matter of public knowledge and sometimes in diplomacy it is a good idea for not everything to be public.

Q: Did you have the feeling, sort of sitting outside Kissinger's office when Dobrynin came in that things were being decided and you were being told be sure you do this and do that? Would instructions come from Kissinger afterwards?

BREMER: Yes, generally I think his records would show that often Kissinger met alone with Dobrynin . So on our side, anyway, there was no written record of what happened. I assume Dobrynin would go back and dictate a telegram. Kissinger would normally call one of us in and say we decided to do this or we decided to do that or I need a memo from Art Hartmann who was assistant secretary for European affairs to do this or that.

On a personal basis they appeared to have a good, easy-going relationship. Of course, they were both professionals so they knew what the limits were.

Q: Did the Chinese connection, was it bearing fruit, did you feel or was this almost a major one shot deal just to let the Soviets know we had other fish to fry or something like that?

BREMER: I don't have a strong memory of how the China thing played out.

Q: One does have the feeling that it sort of happened and OK, there it is but not much preceded from it, outside of the fact that there was somebody else sitting at the table.

BREMER: Winston Lord would be a much better person to ask; the very fact that I am hesitating suggests that it didn't make a big impression on me.

Going back a bit, how it was to work for Henry. He worked regularly until 10 or 11 at night and then he usually went off to dinner somewhere, sometimes later than that. I remember an occasion, I think we were working on a speech, which was always a nightmare, going through draft number 16 or something -- I mentioned before how important speeches were to him. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning. He called me in to yell at me about something about the speech and he basically accused me of working more closely with one of the assistant secretaries than with him -- kind of questioning my loyalty. Here I am at 3 o'clock in the morning and I knew I had to be back at 6:30 in the morning. He had secret service protection at that time. Walt Bothe, the head of his USSS detail standing post just outside Henry's office. As I came out, I turned to Walt and said, "You know, you Secret Service guys are not assessing the threat correctly here." He look puzzled and I added, "You should be looking for people who have access and motive" and I walked away.

Q: Was he one of these people, as with Nixon, who would blow up and the whole idea was sort of disengage yourself and then wait for it to simmer down and then go back or to forget about it?

BREMER: No, Henry was different. I didn't have enough direct experience with Nixon but I could tell there were times when he would say, "Do this". I told one story about Rogers. Nixon did it with Kissinger, you know: "I want this done by tonight" and then it would kind of go away because Nixon had other things on his mind. The bureaucracy learned to slow-walk some instructions, even from the President.

Kissinger was quite demanding and he would stick with something until he was either persuaded it was the wrong course, or he got his way. He tended to blow off steam to those of us on his personal staff, which is, after all, one of the roles of the staff. You take the brunt; you are a buffer in a way and that's OK. You get used to it or you leave.

When we hired new staff, we used to say they were either gone in 24 hours because they couldn't take it, or they stayed on. He was a tough taskmaster but I came to have great respect for him.

Q: Did Nancy Kissinger, when she came on board, was she helpful at all?

BREMER: She was. I think she softened some of the edges a bit. One of the more interesting sidelights was Francie and I went on their honeymoon with them. It was quite amusing. I remember it was a Thursday evening and he had been planning a vacation starting that weekend to go to Acapulco as he had done for years -- he had friends who loaned him their house for a week. He called me in Thursday night and said, "I am going to marry Nancy Saturday morning and fly down there and I'd like you to come down to keep me staffed during our honeymoon."

I said, "Mr. Secretary, I've been on the road with you for something like 200 out of the last 250 days. I've got two young children and a wife and I just can't do that." In the end he said, "Well, you can bring your wife." And so Francie and I went to Acapulco on their honeymoon with them. The pace for me didn't relax much. We had State Department and White House communications -- he was still both Secretary and NSC advisor -- so we received the usual hourly flow of cables, reports, memos, press stories, etc. We were in our villa and he had his villa. I would make several runs each day with the cable and memo traffic, get his guidance on action items, scurry back to our villa and send off instructions to State and the NSC. We were there for about a week.

Q: How did this set, you're a married man and you've got two kids by this point and you wanted to get out and all of a sudden you've got three and a half or more years under high pressure. How did this hit sort of married life?

BREMER: Not very well and in the end that's why I left. I had planned to stay through the '76 election. But in early '76 Francie put down her foot and said, "Look, this can't go on." It had been five years of this work pace, starting in the secretariat, then NMCC and the ops center and then working for Rogers and then for Kissinger. I was pretty burned-out and she was very burned out. So I told him I just had to leave. Family comes first and so that was the end of my assignment. We went off to Norway.

Q: Were you there at the time when the bugging of the telephone situation came out? Would you talk about that?

BREMER: When Kissinger came over to the State Department, he imported a system that had been established at the NSC which recorded his phone calls; they were automatically recorded and then stenographers typed up verbatim records of them. Their purpose was twofold: one, for immediate follow-up. He just told the assistant secretary to get him a paper on economic policy towards Russia by tonight, so the staff needed to know that and to follow up to be sure that happened. And then for historic purposes, in terms of what did he say on the telephone to Dobrynin or Dinitz or somebody.

When he came to the State Department, I was uneasy about this process of actually taping people's phone calls. I am not an attorney so I wasn't looking at it from a legal point of view; I was just saying it makes me uneasy. So I persuaded him that we should not make recordings anymore. Instead, the secretaries would listen to the calls and make the notes as they listened. We would still get stenographic records, although obviously less accurate because you couldn't go back and forth and hear them. You had to do it one time in real time. Those records were then typed up and a copy was circulated to the staff, basically for the purpose of follow-up; that was our main purpose.

I can't remember the sequence of when that happened but it happened soon after he came over. Admittedly this was a fine distinction -- between actual tape recordings and stenographic records.

Q: There reached a point at some point where instructions were given to bug the telephones of

BREMER: Oh, that was before he came to the State Department. That's when he was over at the NSC. You are talking about something else. That happened when he was at the White House. I was not involved in that.

Q: Peter Rodman just died but who, what was his role?

BREMER: Peter was very long-term associate of Henry's. He had been a student of Henry's at Harvard, worked for him at the White House in a staff job, came to the State Department. I think he worked with Winston in policy planning. He was a beautiful writer, had a wonderful mind and supplemented Winston in terms of their ability to help Kissinger think about the broad strategic view. Peter was very knowledgeable on the Soviet Union and so he was helpful in Europe the way Winston was helpful with China. These were the two big subjects. He was very close to Kissinger.

Q: Were you with Kissinger during Watergate or not?

BREMER: Yes during the denouement. The break-in was '72 when I was still working for Rogers. Kissinger came to the State Department in '73 but I was there for the denouement including Nixon's resignation in '74.

Q: How did that play in the secretary's office?

BREMER: The strategic problem was that we had a collapsing presidency which became obvious by the spring of '74. I went off with Kissinger on the various Middle East shuttles, including the 33-day shuttle that brought about the second disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria in April and May. A lot of the activity on that trip was encouraged by Nixon. He wanted a diplomatic success of some kind -- in effect, he didn't want Kissinger to come home empty-handed. So for 33 days we shuttled between Jerusalem and Damascus and Cairo and Cyprus and all over the place in an absolutely exhausting visit which ended in success. It didn't save Nixon, of course. The

disengagement agreement was reached I think in the middle of May and Nixon wound up resigning in August. Somewhere I have a copy of his resignation letter because the President resigned to the Secretary of State.

Watergate had two effects: making the overall conduct of foreign policy much more difficult because other countries could see we were weakening, our presidency was weakening. That in turn had the effect of strengthening Kissinger within the American government because he was a high wire act and it was about the only act that anybody had going, including Nixon. That's why Nixon kept saying, "You've got to get a success." In the end, it didn't save Nixon. So Watergate definitely had an effect.

Q: Did Alexander Haig run across your radar at the time?

BREMER: Yes, but only periodically because he was at the White House. I worked for Haig later when he became secretary of state.

Q: How would you describe Kissinger's relationship during the time you were with him with Congress?

BREMER: I would say on the whole, he was quite attentive to Congress' views because they had cut off funding for Vietnam and we were going to have to wind up a major war. He was under attack from the right for his détente with the Russians and his opening to China. So he paid a lot of attention to them. About his relationships with particular congressmen, you would to look person by person.

Q: I was wondering whether he made an effort to bring people, you know, senators or congressmen over to talk to the president.

BREMER: Yes, they came, they visited. Scoop Jackson came to State a number of times, I remember. Most of the time there was interaction on the telephone. He saw them at dinners. The Kissingers were quite social; despite his work schedule, he did get around. Generally he didn't go to embassies for dinner. But he saw congressmen at other Washington social events.

Q: Did you get hit with night thoughts, telephone calls in the middle of the night at home and do this or?

BREMER: Yes, although most of the night thoughts came when we were still at the office, since he didn't leave until 10 or 11 o'clock at night. Most of the time each day was long enough as it was.

Q: What was your feeling on these shuttle things during, trying to bring peace in the Middle East? Did you get any feel for this? Were there any characters involved in this?

BREMER: There were some big figures. Golda Meir was prime minister in Israel. Hafez Assad was president of Syria, Anwar Sadat was in Egypt, and King Hussein was in

Jordan. These were important people. You got the impression these were very tough people living in a rough neighborhood. Golda Meir with her background didn't take any nonsense off anybody, including Henry. Henry has written stories about his meetings with Assad. I sat in on a couple of them. Assad was a very tough character -- charming but very tough. Then you had Sadat who had a softness, a kind of humanity, about him that was quite striking, compared to these other very tough people.

Q: Just to give a feel for this, what were you doing during one of these shuttle things?

BREMER: It was mostly what a staff person does; help him prepare for meetings and help him report back on meetings all the while keeping him abreast of developments elsewhere in the world. When Henry was 'double-hatted' -- he was national security adviser and secretary of state -- we had two separate communications channels at this time. We had WACA, White House communications, which was handling cables that went directly to the NSC and to the President if necessary and we had the State Department, normal secretary of state communications.

So every day there was a huge volume of traffic in both channels in both directions We had to figure out what of this he needed to know because as I mentioned earlier, he basically ran the State Department even when he was traveling. There was an acting secretary but any important decision had to come to the secretary, plus there were the daily reports from all of his assistant secretaries. Then there was the question of his meetings wherever we were: who was going to go to which meetings and who was going to be the note taker and who was going to write the cables. One of us, I or one of the other staff, would have to clear the cables on behalf of the secretary unless we thought it was sensitive, in which case we'd have to get him to look at them.

There was a daily report to the president. Either one of the other State Department assistant secretaries or I would draft the cable to the president. That went through the White House channels and not to the State Department on the rather flimsy reasoning that Kissinger's daily report was sent in his role as National Security Advisor.

There were logistics questions; who's going over to Damascus today and what time is the plane leaving. It was pretty much a full time operation. Most of the logistics were the responsibility of the secretariat staff who, as usual, accompanied the Secretary when he traveled, as I had done when in the secretariat on the Nixon trip to Moscow in 1972.

In various meetings I would be the note taker, take the notes and write up the record, usually as a cable.

Q: One of the sort of complaints I have heard from time to time, people saying when Kissinger would go, particularly on these shuttle things, he wouldn't always inform his ambassador of the particular country what had been said and so this left the ambassador in sort of a never-never land, or not?

BREMER: I think that's correct in some cases. Not so much in the Middle East, though. The ambassador in Syria was Dick Murphy and Herman Eilts was in Egypt and Tom Pickering was in Jordan. They were all deeply involved in the discussions with the governments to which they were accredited.

It depended a lot on whether Kissinger trusted the ambassador. As a general rule -- at least on the Middle East visits -- they came into the meetings with the head of state. Certainly Henry was secretive and didn't reveal everything that was going on to everybody. I am sure there were times on other visits when the US Ambassador was not included. Until he came to know and trust somebody, Kissinger was very circumspect about what he would tell. There were degrees of information to different people.

One of the things those of us on his personal staff had to do was remember who was cleared to know what. It was complicated.

Q: Did you find when you came out of a meeting and there would be the ambassador, saying, "What happened?"

BREMER: Of course, and you tried to be as helpful as you could within the scope of what you thought the secretary would allow, or sometimes more than that because you knew the Ambassador had to know. Since I was a diplomat, although not a very experienced one at that point, I knew that there was a need to know what was going on, and sometimes Henry would say to one of us, "Don't tell so and so" and we'd fight back. "Look, he's got to know because the meeting in Cyprus is coming up in 48 hours." Usually he would be reasonable once you explained why someone needed to know. He didn't have to know just because he had to know but because something had to happen or the Ambassador had to do something.

Q: I am told that Kissinger like so many people who are very tough, if somebody is essentially tough back, but to be tough with a reason that he was not unbending.

BREMER: It's true that he was both tough and not unbending. That's why I think people have assessed that he had one of the strongest team of assistant secretaries. In the end, if the assistant secretary wouldn't stand up to him, Kissinger wouldn't respect him and that guy was going to be gone. He had a very strong group of people around him who were not afraid to say, "You are wrong, Mr. Secretary. That's not the way it's going to work. Here's what happens if you do that." I won't say every time he would agree; of course not, but he would listen to the argument and where it was a reasonable point, he would agree, even if it meant reversing himself. You could not work closely with Kissinger and not be fairly strong because he would run you into the ground if you weren't strong.

What offended me in that 3:00 conversation was he accused me in effect of disloyalty. I was "working too closely" with Art Hartman or somebody. I was pretty frosted by that. It was 3 o'clock in the morning. Word got back to him somehow that I was angry. The next morning he was working out of his NSC office. I got word to come over there which I did almost every day. He called me in and apologized. He had realized he had gone too far.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you, but it is kind of going back a bit, but I wonder if you could talk a bit about Henry Kissinger. I interviewed Peter Rodman who just died. I saw that you were at his memorial service. Henry Kissinger really had a remarkable record of recruiting people who have done well elsewhere and really very bright people. What was it? Did he attract them? Did they seek him out? What do you attribute his success in having this cadre around?

BREMER: Henry was able to mobilize the State Department and the Foreign Service by being a very demanding secretary. My view is that the Foreign Service is probably the most talented group of people in Washington but there is a tendency in the State Department towards fiefdoms. Dean Acheson used to talk about the department "baronies." Nothing much has changed in the last 50 years. Each of the bureaus is run rather like a fiefdom. So the way the State Department operates in normal circumstances is that the assistant secretaries on the 6th floor often try to avoid having big problems go to the 7th floor, to the secretary, because they know he's going to "interfere" in their planning. .

Q: Screw things up.

BREMER: Or mess up their private arrangements with each other. So when Henry came to the State Department in 1973, he replaced Bill Rogers who was not a very demanding secretary of state, a very nice man but not very demanding. He had a bit of a lawyer's approach to foreign policy thinking of each country as a separate client and there was little strategic thinking.

Henry couldn't have been more different. He demanded that all important issues be brought to him. He wanted to make the important decisions. He was also demanding of the quality of work coming from the assistant secretaries. I think the answer was twofold: first, that his style challenged the Foreign Service in a way it hadn't been challenged probably since the 1950s, under Acheson and Dulles. Those Foreign Service officers who were capable and able to take the pressure and the demands of Henry proved themselves to be quite extraordinary, as you pointed out. Some of them went on to greater public service. And as I mentioned in an earlier interview, Henry knew enough to ask good questions and to take it well if an experienced officer told him his plan of action was wrong -- as long as he could back up his assertions.

The officers who couldn't take this brutal pace fell by the way very quickly. Since I was his chief of staff, I saw it first hand in recruiting for his personal staff because he was even tougher on his personal staff. If you couldn't take the pressure and sometimes the abuse, you were out very quickly. We had people who we would recruit to be a special assistant and 48 hours later they'd say they really didn't want the job.

So I think the answer about Henry was first, he was very smart, he was extremely demanding, and in the end he forced people to perform above what they thought they could do. That certainly was my experience. I was performing at a level I didn't realize I

could. I think it was true of a lot of people and therefore he brought the best out of people. As you pointed out, a number of them have gone on to other things.

Q: We have basically covered until you left Kissinger. You left when?

BREMER: In January or February of ’76.

Q: And then what?

BREMER: I went off as deputy chief of mission in Oslo, Norway.

Q: Today is October 7, 2008. Jerry, you are off to Oslo as DCM in 1976. How did the DCM job come around?

BREMER: I had been working as Kissinger’s chief of staff for more than a year, maybe 15 or 16 months by then and I was worn out. I had been in the position working first for Rogers, then Kissinger for almost five years. I had two young kids, Francie was fed up with the life. So I told Kissinger I had to get out for the sake of my family life.

I was offered the chance to go to Norway in January of ’76 and I immediately took it. I hadn’t been to Norway but I was interested in the opportunity.

Q: Who was the ambassador to Norway at the time?

BREMER: It was Tom Byrne but he stayed only a couple of months. He was transferred, maybe two or three months after I got there. He went to Czechoslovakia.

Q: That’s sort of unusual, isn’t it, to have a Foreign Service officer there?

BREMER: Yes, but Tom had very good connections with the U.S. labor movement. I think he was very close to Irving Brown.

Q: So, more or less you were charge?

BREMER: I became chargé almost as soon as I arrived until the arrival of the second of the three ambassadors I served under in Norway, who was Bill Anders. Bill came in the summer of ’76. Bill had been an astronaut on Apollo 8; he had been an Air Force officer and a nuclear engineer. He was at NASA for a while after that and then he became a member of what was then called the Atomic Energy Commission, AEC, which eventually became the NRC(Nuclear Regulatory Commission). Again, I am not sure what his political connection was except he was offered the job in Norway and came in the summer of ’76.

Q: What was the political situation in Norway and then in Norway’s basic position?

BREMER: Norway's political situation was quite interesting. I have to go back in their history. The Norwegians, like most of the northern Europeans, sat out the First World War as neutrals and drew the conclusion that neutrality was an effective foreign policy in the 20th century. Well, they were invaded by the Germans, a surprise attack in April of 1940, and like a number of the northern Europeans, the Norwegians, the Danes, the Dutch, the Belgians -- the lesson they took from the Second World War was that neutrality didn't work. So after the Second World War Norway, like those other countries, became an active and vigorous member of NATO. The policy of supporting NATO had been carried out by successive Norwegian governments of both right and left for the following -- by the time I was there -- thirty years.

In 1976, Norway was under a social democratic government. But there is an important distinction in Norway from some of the continental labor movements. The labor movement in Norway, called the LO, had never been involved in violent manifestations against the government as had been the case in France with the communist labor unions or in Germany where labor unions had been somewhat more violent.

In Norway, the whole labor movement tended to be responsible. As a result, the labor government which was in power when I arrived in Norway was a very strong supporter of NATO which was the key American interest. Norway was the only NATO country other than Turkey that bordered on the Soviet Union. This made it a vital listening post and observation post for monitoring particularly the Russian North Sea fleet which had its base in Murmansk, not far from the Norwegian border.

Q: The Kola Peninsula, military complex.

BREMER: The Russians had a huge naval complex there. One can read in Russian history how for centuries their rulers had been concerned to be able to get ships to sea. Murmansk filled the bill. When the Russians deployed their long range submarines, they had to come across what is called the GIUK Gap, the Greenland, Iceland, and UK Gap -- that section of the North Sea west of the Norwegian coast. Knowing about these deployments was vital in arriving at America's overall assessment of Soviet strategy and obviously their immediate deployments. Working with Norwegians we had a very active anti-submarine program involving P-3 planes flown from Norwegian air fields.

Q: This would be the Orion?

BREMER: The Orion P-3s to survey this area and to track Russian submarines as well as their surface fleet.

As a result of their previous neutrality, and out of concern not needlessly to provoke the Russians, when they joined NATO the Norwegians specified that they would not allow any foreign troops to be stationed on Norwegian soil. We had American military personnel in a NATO command which at the time was called AFNORTH, located outside of Oslo. But like all other NATO members, we had no forces stationed in Norway. We did conduct regular exercises with American, British, Dutch and other forces in Norway.

But the Norwegians had also established restrictions on how far north in Norway those forces could go. The Norwegians were sensitive to the fact they have a common border with the Soviet Union. They restricted the NATO exercises to a line far of the border at Kirkenes.

So we had an interest in Norway and an interest in their being a good ally in NATO. That was our major interest.

Q: This is slightly before your time but how had the Norwegians been regarding our involvement in Vietnam? We know how the Swedes reacted and I was wondering whether there was a difference.

BREMER: By the time I arrived we had basically lost in Vietnam. We had abandoned Vietnam in April of '75. So it wasn't as hot an issue as it had been before. I remember Tom Byrne telling me a couple of years earlier he had become fed up with the coverage about Vietnam on Norwegian television. Byrne went in to see the director of the Norwegian broadcasting company who made a bunch of excuses about how it wasn't his job to set the policy. Tom told me he pushed his chair back and said, "Well, I guess you are not the right person to talk to" and walked out. I rather admired his approach. But by the time I was there, it was not a major issue in our relations with Norway.

Q: What was the embassy like? The staff?

BREMER: By the standard of American Embassies in Europe, Oslo was a rather small embassy, medium by worldwide standards. We had a three man political section, maybe three in the economic section. We had an active USIA, as it was then called, a PAO, Cultural Affairs and Information Officers. We had both a defense attaché and an ODC, Office of Defense Cooperation which I thought was unnecessary and confusing but we had two. So we had a lot of interaction with what you would call the political-military people in the Norwegian government and think-tanks.

The quality of the people at the post varied.

Q: Norway is not at the hub of the universe.

How did you find dealing with the Norwegian government?

BREMER: Compared to my previous experience in Afghanistan and Africa, it was less stressful, both professionally and to our family. First of all, the Norwegians are pretty open and direct. They pretty much told you what was on their mind. If they had any disagreements, they told you. So dealing with them was businesslike

Q: You were there from when to when?

BREMER: I was there from early 1976 until towards the end of '79.

Q: You were there when we had an election and Carter came in. Carter was sort of an unknown force at that time. I was just wondering, particularly a charge when some of this was happening, did you find yourself trying to, in the first place, bring yourself up to speed, who is this guy, Jimmy Carter, and then trying to explain what this meant?

BREMER: It got quite challenging because, first, nobody knew much about Carter or what his policies would be. Then we had a change of ambassadors. I was chargé again for a period of time until Carter's ambassador came. His mother owned a series of newspapers in the Chicago area and had been one of the first Carter supporters in the upper Midwest, long before anybody knew about him. Her newspapers had supported Carter very early in the election cycle. So the reward for her was to have her son, Louis Lerner, named Ambassador. Lerner came, I think in the summer of '77.

In a way, it complicated things. Lerner was undisciplined in his approach. He had no background in foreign policy -- I don't hold that against him -- but he was quite a contrast from Bill Anders, who had been a military man. Bill tended to take a disciplined approach to instructions from Washington. He would sit with his staff, whether it was me or his political counselor, and talk about the meeting he was going to have with the foreign minister. He would go with somebody, a note taker, they would write a cable, standard Foreign Service stuff. All very disciplined.

For some reason, Lerner made it his habit not to do any of those things. If an instruction came for us to make a demarche of some kind to the Norwegian government, he would most often just go off on his own, often without consulting anybody on the staff. Afterwards, we often had a hard time finding out what had actually happened in the meting, if anything had happened. This got quite complicated because Carter made a few decisions that were very embarrassing to the Norwegian government; cancellation of the neutron bomb and the cancellation of the B-1 bomber in particular. The Norwegian government was a labor government, therefore a government of the left, and they were always under pressure from their left to not be totally supportive of the United States, partly coming from the tensions of the Vietnam era.

The key man for us in the Norwegian government was the foreign minister, Knut Frydenlund. He was a wonderful man, strong Labor Party guy, very modest and soft spoken but a real supporter of NATO and its importance to Norway. The labor government had really stuck its neck out -- Frydenlund particularly -- defending the initial decision to deploy the neutron bomb and to deploy the B-1 bomber. When Carter, -- without any pre notification to the allies, at least not to the Norwegians -- publicly changed his mind, it was an enormous embarrassment to the government and to Frydenlund personally..

One result was that Frydenlund decided that he couldn't rely on Lerner to get his messages clearly through to Washington. So to my great unease, after a few similar fiascos, Frydenlund would wait until Lerner was out of the country or up country and then call me in for a meeting and unburden himself on his views on what was happening in Washington. This did not improve my relationship with the ambassador, to put it

mildly. But I understood what Frydenlund was doing and I understood why he was doing it. I did my best to square the circle, But it was a clear indication that the Norwegian government understood that the ambassador wasn't a reliable channel. It made it very awkward for Lerner and for me.

We had some personnel issues in the embassy at the same time, dealing with people in the political section and which had to do with Lerner's management style which further exacerbated things. All in all it was the hardest job I had in the Foreign Service.

Q: We're looking at management styles, could you talk a little about that?

BREMER: Let me tell you what the problem was, without naming names.

I don't know the immediate cause of this, but I got the impression that I made Lerner nervous. I had been there a year and a half, I spoke Norwegian and knew a lot of Norwegians, and they knew me. So he was admittedly coming into a difficult situation and had never been involved in foreign policy. I understood this and tried to alleviate his angst. But whatever the reason was, he deliberately set about to try to undercut my authority as deputy by, in effect, becoming best buddies, first name basis, with the second or third person in each of the sections; the political section, the economic section, the PAO's office. That not only undercut me but more importantly it undercut the heads of those sections. It's hard to imagine how a top manager could make a bigger hash of the team of which he was the leader, and which wanted to help him.

We had a particular problem in one section where we had an underperforming counselor. I agreed that he was underperforming. Lerner said to me, "I want him out of here, get him out of here." I said, "Lou, the system is this; you have to make a case, you have to make a record, he has to be counseled. We have to make a record of our counseling. We have processes here in the Foreign Service you have to go through. You can't just send somebody home. Those days are over." He never really understood that. I counseled this particular man a number of times. I made a record of my counseling.

The situation got so delicate that I asked George Vest, at that time director general of personnel, to make a slight detour to Oslo in a trip he was making to Europe for some other reason. Francie and I invited him to come for Easter the spring of'78. I unburdened myself to George. I said, "Look, this situation is getting impossible. The Ambassador is insisting this fellow be recalled. I can't make him understand. I need some help here. I need some support" which George gave me. He met with the ambassador and told him this is the way the system works. In any case, Lou could never make a convincing case either to me or, more importantly, to the system that in fact this fellow's performance was so poor that he should be removed, and so he wasn't. But again I am sure this rankled Lou.

Q: One of the problems at a post like Norway, if you have somebody who is a good officer but not wonderful or even not so good, well, we can't obviously send this person

to Tel Aviv, so Norway seems like a safe holding area and I imagine you had the feeling you were getting a little bit of this.

BREMER: I felt that fundamental justice wasn't being done to this guy. He was sub performing, no question. In an ideal world, he might not have even been in the Foreign Service. But we had to be fair to him. My role as DCM, at least as I saw it, was to countervail. That's what a DCM does. If the ambassador is outward oriented, the DCM needs to manage the place. I felt that I had to kind of countervail a little bit. I had to defend this guy, and defend the justice of the system. It was certainly awkward and very difficult.

Q: I am trying to get the outlook. What was the general thinking on the military side when you've got the Kola Peninsula and you've got the Soviets sitting up there. If things happened, were we looking, expecting an invasion or what?

BREMER: No, I don't think the plans were particularly concerned about an invasion because if you look at what happened in the Second World War, the Germans invaded and occupied Norway in April of 1940. Hitler wanted to use the bases on the west coast of Norway for their fighter bombers to reach over to the northern UK. They could get there from Norway. The Germans wound up with 250,000 troops in Norway during the war. That's a lot of troops tied up there, most of them north of Tromso, which is the northernmost city. I think our military assessment, and we assumed the Russian assessment, was that this was a waste of an awful lot of troops. That's ten divisions Hitler could have used down in France.

I think our concern in Norway was the movement of the Murmansk fleet, particularly the submarines. Also they flew backfire bombers out of there and they had their surface fleet.

Q: Backfire bombers were basically B-29s, weren't they?

BREMER: No, they were the equivalent of our B-52s. They were the Soviets' long range strategic bombers. They also flew in that same GIUK gap. Norway was a very important distant early warning system for large scale movements of Soviet forces. In those days, tracking the Russian submarine fleet was a major job of the U.S. navy. .

As a result, military relations were particularly close between the navies, as you would expect.

Q: Were the Soviets playing this submarine probing game into the fjords? In Sweden they apparently were doing this.

BREMER: You never knew. It was the case that periodically we would see reports of Norwegians sighting what they thought were submarines in their fjords. The fjords are very deep; some of them are 1,500, 2,000 feet deep; so, in theory, you could run a submarine up in there. It's hard to say, frankly.

One of the interesting things about Norway's international relations was their rejection of membership in the EU in 1972. This was the result of a hugely divisive political debate and popular referendum. One argument then was that "we Norwegians are very different from those Europeans".

The Norwegians face west, to the sea -- anyway since the Viking days -- not the South toward Europe. If you ask a Norwegian where he went on his vacation, he will say "I went down to Europe" in much the same way the British will say they went "over to Europe". In other words, they do not psychologically and culturally see themselves as part of Europe. There is a big gap.

They had voted down the EU. So one of our objectives at the embassy was to try to solidify the NATO tie. The NATO tie they tended to see largely as a bilateral matter, when they peeled it all away, between two navies. We tried to get them to broaden their understanding of what it meant to have European allies and how that could help Norway in a serious crisis. We needed to remind them that Article V of the NATO Treaty meant that an attack on one ally was an attack on all. They could understand that if the Soviets came across their border in the cold frozen north, all NATO allies would be engaged. They had to see that the same principle applied to, say, an attack on Italy.

So the Embassy ran a series of tours sponsored by USIA taking Norwegians down to visit Brussels to see the NATO headquarters. And then out to the Fulda Gap in Germany and to other NATO posts. On a tour I led we took 5 or 6 up and coming Norwegian parliamentarians out to an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean, part of the Sixth Fleet, to give them a broader understanding of what NATO involved. In fact, Norway's membership involved the defense of Italy. When the referendum was defeated in 1972, one of the less edifying slogans against it was "those people down there cook with olive oil, they don't cook with butter." There really was a cultural thing and taking them to Italy was important. Hey, by the way, you guys are committed to defend this place too.

Q: What about the Swedish connection?

BREMER: It is a love hate relationship. The languages are essentially the same, with minor differences; Swedish is written the same as Norwegian but pronounced differently. The Swedes historically have looked down on the Norwegians country bumpkins. No question, historically Sweden is much more sophisticated. While I was in Oslo the first Norwegian oil was coming in and the big status symbol for a Norwegian was to have a Swedish chauffeur.

There's a well known story about the Swedes and the Norwegians. In Norway I got involved with cross-country skiing. I did a lot of long distance races. The longest and most famous race in Norway is called the Birkebeiner race, 'birch pant legs.' It commemorates a 13th century incident. The Norwegian royal family including the heir, the crown prince, were staying in the forests near in Rena, a small town near the Swedish border not far from Lillehammer where the1994 Olympics were held. A group of Swedes came across the border to try to kidnap the Norwegian crown prince. These brave

foresters, called the Birkebeiners because they were wore birch leggings, put the prince on their back and taken him by ski 62 kilometers across two mountain ranges to safety in Lillehammer. The Norwegians argue that these forest men saved the Norwegian dynasty. It's a great moment in Norwegian Swedish history. Every year the Birkebeiner race is held to commemorate that event. Every registrant in the race has to carry a 15 kilo pack on his back representing the crown prince. Each skier's pack is weighed at the start to be sure you are a "real birkebeiner". Then you ski the 62 kilometers over the same two mountains down to safety in Lillehammer. I used to say to my Norwegian friends, having done the race, "It's a good thing for Norway that I wasn't there in the 13th century -- we'd all be speaking Swedish."

Even in the 70s the Norwegians still resented what they saw as Sweden's one sided neutrality in the Second World War. The Swedes allowed German troop and supply trains transit across Sweden and sometimes taking Norwegians back to concentration camps on those trains. So the Norwegians felt that the Swedes had, in effect, bent their neutrality towards the Germans.

Q: And they did.

BREMER: In any case, it was a matter of, here are the Norwegians sticking their neck out for NATO and here are the Swedes. So relations were sometimes touchy.

Q: Was there any quiet cooperation between the Norwegians which we were using and the Swedes regarding the Soviet threat?

BREMER: I'm not privy to what discussions there were directly between the Norwegian general staff and the Swedish general staff. The question of what the Swedes would actually do in the event of a Soviet assault in Europe was always open, it was never all that clear. We would talk to the Norwegians from time to time. If they had any greater clarity than we did, they never shared it with us. I don't think the Swedes talked to anybody much about it at the time. But I assumed, and I think it was the assumption of our government, that in the event of a Soviet assault of some kind the Swedes would certainly defend Sweden as indeed they had had defended Sweden against the Germans. They shot down lots of German planes, even though they were neutral. At the time they had one of Europe's most modern air forces.

Q: How did you find, I know we have a lot of joint exercises, including landing exercises. It has been one of the big operations of NATO. How did you find the military to military?

BREMER: The military to military relationship was excellent, particularly navy to navy. And marines who came every year for winter exercises up in the mountains. The Dutch marines used to go and exercise with the Americans and Norwegians in the winter. When I was ambassador to the Netherlands some years later, I went with the Dutch marines and bivouacked one night out with them. It was 25 below zero. Norway and the US had a lot of exercises. As I mentioned all foreign troops were restricted about how far north they could go when on exercises in Norway. The American government understood, although

we weren't wild about it, that we couldn't base soldiers there. But that was the Norwegian policy and you don't base soldiers where they are not wanted.

Q: How did the Norwegian community, the bachelor Norwegian farmers in Minnesota. There is a strong Norwegian community in the United States.

BREMER: They were quite active. First we had a lot of American tourists, many of them Norwegian Americans. So we had lots of consular work. Some successful Norwegian-American businessmen came, although I don't remember it being a big matter. We had good commercial relations but it was not a major market for American goods. We were interested in and encouraged Norway to develop its oil.

One of the issues that involved us and the Russians and the Norwegians was the fact that the sea border between Norway and the Soviet Union in the Barents Sea, had not been delineated. That was potentially a fairly major problem especially as the geology at the time suggested there could be quite a lot of oil in the contested area. We worked with the Norwegians to try to find a solution. A temporary solution was arrived at by a Norwegian minister, Jens Evensen. It established a contested area called the "Gray Zone" in which a temporary condominium was agreed to. I can't remember the details about how the border was drawn differently by the Russians than by the Norwegians. Some years later it was discovered that Evensen's top aide had been a Russian spy, which ended Evensen's career and obviously also his aide's career. The aide, who had been a friend of ours, went to jail. In fact, when his trial was held, I was Ambassador to the Netherlands and his attorneys asked if I would come testify about him. I refused.

Another interesting aspect of Norwegian-Russian relations those days was Svalbard, an island located 400 miles north of the northernmost point in Norway; that's how far north it is, very close to the North Pole. Svalbard is an inhabited island. In fact, it is the northernmost inhabited place in the world; at least it was in 1977. After the First World War, the question of who owns Svalbard was adjudicated by a treaty which declared Norway, if I remember the details, as sovereign there. But the arrangement also took into account that the Russians had established a coal mine operation on the Island before their Revolution. There is coal in Svalbard.

So the treaty of Svalbard and the status of Svalbard where there was both a Norwegian community in one place and a Russian community in another, both of them mining coal, only for political purposes, because it had no real commercial value. It was another rubbing point between our ally, the Norwegians, and the Russians. The two issues, Svalbard and the undecided sea boundary in the Barents Sea, created a fair amount of friction. If you look at a map, you can see that Svalbard is the first island in the strategic GIUK gap we talked about earlier. So from America's point of view, we did not want to see the Russians in control on the island.

One of my most memorable trips as a diplomat was a trip to Svalbard in the summer, actually at midsummer. You see these pictures of midsummer in post cards in Norway and the sun is setting and it comes down to the horizon and goes up. In Svalbard you are

so close to the North Pole, that at mid summer, the sun goes around into a tight little circle above your head. At 2 o'clock in the morning and at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, it's there. It is always daylight. In the winter of course, it is always dark.

Q: How about Spitsbergen?

BREMER: That's the same thing.

Q: I recall as a kid seeing the commandos landing at Spitsbergen.

BREMER: That's the same place. The Svalbard Treaty came through the Second World War intact, allowing the Norwegians to be there. But its territorial status was certainly ambiguous because the Russians were there and the Russians kept a substantial presence there under the pretext of mining coal.

Q: How stood German - Norwegian relations? Germany was the big power.

BREMER: The Germans kept a pretty low profile while I was there. Memories were still pretty sensitive about the occupation. The occupation in Norway was not as vicious as it was in the Netherlands where I subsequently served. Of course, the Germans were a lot closer on the border of the Netherlands. The Germans kept a pretty low profile in Norway in the 1970s. They had a difficult row to hoe at that point.

Q: What about the whole Quisling movement? Had that and sort of Norway taken care of that early on because you know in France they have really never worked out cooperation.

BREMER: It's a good question and there is an interesting story.

In the 1950s at some point the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, passed a law or regulation which allowed people to apply for disability for psychological stress they had undergone in the resistance during the war. By the early 1960s, so many people had applied for this disability -- arguing that they had been involved in the resistance and they had terrible pressures and it was just awful -- that the Norwegians appointed a commission to look into it. An American historian named Petra wrote a book about what the commission found which he published towards the end of the '60s. What the commission found was that very few Norwegians actually were actively involved in the resistance. The Norwegians did a terrific job of PR in their resistance with several notable exploits such as the Telemark incident.

Q: The Heroes of Telemark.

BREMER: The attack on the German heavy water project in Telemark, which is the story of that movie. They certainly were very heroic.. The Norwegians played a very strong role in the exile community in London. They were lucky because their king, King Haakon, was able to escape when Hitler attacked them in April of 1940. So he was able to mobilize the Norwegian people from his exile in London, much as the Queen of the

Netherlands and de Gaulle did for their countrymen. But the day-to-day resistance turned out to have been less than you might have thought.

The discussion of people who collaborated in Norway was pretty much over by the time I got there. It didn't continue as it did in France. This was really not an issue. The Petra book had caused quite a sensation when it came out, I think at the end of the '6os. But by the time I was there in the mid 70s, this was not an active matter. Not that the war was forgotten; it just wasn't a big question.

Q: There was a real resentment because Norway had taken in quite a few German youths after World War I. Willie Brandt was one of them, I believe.

BREMER: Yes, it is true that the Germans used some of these "tourists" or "visitors" -- not so much people like Willie Brandt -- but some of the youths who came in the 1930s as spies for the German government. I would hear stories from Norwegians when I drove around the country. I'd go up country and stop in a town, or run into a farmer and he would tell you through clenched teeth that some German had arrived in a big Mercedes last month or last year with his wife and kids and would tell him "We stayed in this house during the war. " The Norwegians did not appreciate that. You heard these stories from people who actually experienced them. The German government kept a pretty low profile during the time I was there.

Q: How about the Soviet embassy? What sort of contact did you have and how did you feel their operation was?

BREMER: I didn't have much. The ambassador had a little, not much. He would see his counterpart at diplomatic things. It was not a big factor. The Russians played a pretty careful hand. They didn't move around a lot, they didn't try to show a big flag. They had a difficult situation and they played it carefully.

Q: What about exchange visas and Norwegian young people going to American universities? Was this much of a thing or were they directed toward the UK?

BREMER: I would say they wanted to go to the U.S. mostly. One of the things I paid a lot of attention to there and subsequently also in the Netherlands was the IV program, the USIA program.

Q: IV, you mean international?

BREMER: International Visitors is a program where the USG would invite Norwegians who we thought might play an important role in Norway's future to visit the United States. The terms were that they could go visit wherever they wanted, meet with whomever they wanted in the US for three weeks. USIA made the logistical arrangements. The program objective was to target the coming generation of Norwegian leaders in all fields -- politics, the arts, etc. But instead of doing this when I got there I found that the program was being used by various section heads to do favors for their

Norwegian friends. But lots of those people had already arrived at positions of importance or power. I felt that as we moved further in time from World War Two, we needed to encourage a range of contacts with the next generation of Norwegian leaders and it didn't seem to me that this was the way the IV program was working. I found the average age of the IV visitor in the two years before I got there was almost 50. I have nothing against 50 year olds but that didn't reflect what I understood to be the program's purpose.

So I established the goal of getting the average age of Norwegian recipients down below 40. We were going to try to get more women involved and we were going to look for people who have some possible path to being an important person in Norway in the future. It worked. We selected for IVs a number of people who became ministers and one at least who became a prime minister.

We had a similar effort to use the Fulbright program to identify future leaders in various disciplines. There were already some relations between American and Norwegian universities. I can't remember many details about them. To the extent we could, we tried to focus both the IV program and the Fulbright program on younger people who we thought had a future in Norwegian society one way or another.

Q: How did you find the universities? In so many countries the universities are sort of hot beds of Marxism. The kids grow out of that but they can cause trouble.

BREMER: In the mid – '70s the universities in Norway were leftist but they were not wildly leftist. I think you had to wait another 10 years for them to get wildly leftist when the anti -Vietnam generation became the professors at the universities and then you really had trouble. In 1976 it was still a bit early for those guys. They were to the left but I spoke pretty regularly at various universities there and I didn't have a lot of problems with them.

Q: How did we view the oil development?

BREMER: The American government was very enthusiastic about the Norwegians developing their oil. I am trying to think what companies were involved. Phillips was the big one that was already offshore. More and more companies, including American companies, were beginning to base themselves on Stavanger the west coast port that became the place of supply for the offshore industry.

So we had to send consular officers to Stavanger on a regular basis to serve what was becoming a bigger and bigger American presence. At that time we had a consulate in Tromso which is way in the north. That was there essentially for political reasons -- to plant the American flag in the far north to ensure that the Russians didn't by creeping assimilation start to take over the north. Again that was an area in the far north where NATO exercises were not allowed. So Tromso became northern most American consular post in the world. There was a lot of discussion back and forth about whether we

shouldn't move that post to Stavanger. I think long after, they did open a post in Stavanger and closed the one in Tromso.

Q: During the Carter administration, here you had been in the center of the Kissinger hurricane and all and you were obviously at great remove, but what was your view as you were hearing colleagues and reading about it how the Carter administration was operated?

BREMER: My main concern was what was going to be Carter's approach to the Soviet Union generally and to Norway, to NATO in particular. As I mentioned I was very concerned when he made a couple of decisions on the neutron bomb and the B-1 bomber that had two effects: You can argue the military effect of the neutron bomb. Was it a good idea or a bad idea and it can be argued either way. I happened to think it was not a bad idea. But in any case the political effect of both of those decisions on the alliance really disturbed me. It suggested that the president didn't appreciate the importance of the alliance in confronting the Soviets. And as I mentioned earlier, both decisions severely undercut politically the pro-NATO politicians in Norway's Labor Party which was in power then.

When I was posted back to Washington in 1979, just at the time the Sandinistas took over Nicaragua and a few months before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan my concerns with Carter became even greater.

Q: I talked to people who were in Germany. Helmut Schmidt never forgave Carter for this and things got very frosty because what Carter had done was put a lot of pressure to say, against Schmidt. Nobody wanted to have this bomb and Carter put pressure on, you've got to approve this and then when our allies reluctantly against their political instincts said yes and then we decided not to go ahead.

BREMER: It's exactly the parallel case with Knut Frydenlund who was the foreign minister of Norway. He was also a Social Democrat like Schmidt. He put himself way out on a limb, perhaps not as publicly as Schmidt, but in Norwegian politics he was as far out as Schmidt had been in Germany. He was just flabbergasted, absolutely flabbergasted. He probably never forgave Carter either, although it was less of a thing than with Schmidt.

Q: How did the Norwegians view themselves at that time because later they became considerable players in the, as moderators in the peace movement, particularly in Israeli – Palestinian politics. Did they see themselves being a world power moderator?

BREMER: No, not so much then. You have to remember in Europe in the mid '70s the Europeans were still quite strongly in favor of Israel. The Norwegians and particularly the Dutch had basically banded behind the Israelis in the Yom Kippur War and in the subsequent embargo by OPEC. This was before the Begin-Sadat meetings in Jerusalem which took place in '78. But the pendulum was beginning to swing in Europe and in Norway when Begin became the prime minister. They were worried about him because

they thought he was going to be too bellicose and too far right. Sadat's visit to Israel also started moving European and Norwegian attitudes more in the direction of the Arabs. So you saw a gradual shift, I guess during the time I was in Norway, away from a very strong, pro-Israeli position towards a more nuanced position. I don't think at that time the Norwegians saw themselves as a particular player; they were more kibitzers.

Q: The Swedes have sort of embraced people like Nyerere in Tanzania. Where did the Norwegians fit?

BREMER: That's a good point. The Norwegians did have a disagreement with us, particularly on Tanzania, but on the general approach to promoting socialist economic solutions in the developing world, particularly in Africa. The Norwegians also had spent quite a lot of money and had people in Tanzania. I think they also had some in Kenya but Tanzania was their big focus.

I had lived in Malawi where the economic approach was quite different. The Malawians had no natural resources at all. The Tanzanians at least had something to work with especially a developed tourism business.

I personally was rather skeptical that socialism was going to work any better in Tanzania than it worked in, say, Poland. This was a cause of friction between us and the Norwegians. I wouldn't say it was a major thing but the Norwegians had a different view of the developing world than we did. It wasn't at the top of the list of disagreements though.

Q: As we talk about this, I want to hop back to when you were with Kissinger. Because of the socialist thing, I was thinking this was about '74 or so, did you have any insight or involvement in the Carlucci/Kissinger shootout?

BREMER: I was working for Henry at the time. Frank had the view that we should be open to the possibility that Portugal was going to have a socialist government. Henry didn't agree. I think the question for Henry at that time concerned the reaction of such an American move on European socialists; don't forget this is a time when many European politicians were promoting what they called 'euro communism'. Communism in Europe was going to be different from the communism in the Soviet Union and China. It was going to be more humane and more open. So the question, I think, for Kissinger at the time was not so much is it a socialist country. I don't think he cared all that much about the economics. By his own confession, he's not an economist. It was a question of whether what Soares was promoting as Portuguese socialism was a form of euro-communism and that as a result, under the rubric of "socialism", the European communists might gain political authority in places like Italy and Portugal. So there certainly was a disagreement. I think history shows that Frank Carlucci was right about the opening towards Portuguese socialism. It did not turn out to be communist.
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Q: This was the dispute. I have talked to Carlucci and others and the idea was trying to, I mean there was a very strong, these officers, young officers who took over were strongly attracted and the Portuguese communists came in and luckily played with a very heavy hand. This and the fact that we didn't sort of write them off the books, worked out well.

BREMER: Yes, although it certainly didn't work out too well in the short term for Angola and Mozambique. That's a different story.

Q: That sort of had to happen.

BREMER: Yes, but the communists did take over those places and a lot of people suffered as a result.

Q: How did you find the USIA factor? Was it a pretty good program or not? Did we need it?

BREMER: I thought we needed a USIA program, no question. We wanted to maintain Norwegian public support for the alliance. That was our key strategic objective because of the importance of Norwegian territory for monitoring Soviet strategic forces.

But, I felt there -- and I felt it even more strongly in the Netherlands -- that a fair amount of USIA's activity was misdirected. For example, having a library in Norway didn't make a lot of sense and I didn't think it made any sense in the Netherlands to have a library. What was the point of that? The Dutch have probably the highest English language capability of any non-Anglo country in the world, except maybe Israel. They've got plenty of libraries. The question was not do we need USIA; we needed it. The question was, how do you focus the USIA effort? As I mentioned I found two USIA programs I felt were very important in both Norway and then in the Netherlands; the International Visitor program and the Fulbright program. In both countries I felt these were misdirected. In the case of the IV, it was too much the section heads doing a favor for a friend who happened to be a good friend and so you sent him off to the U.S. for three weeks.

The case of Fulbright was even more noticeable in the Netherlands than it was in Norway. In both countries it was the USIA-appointed Fulbright committee doing favors for their favorite professor somewhere. The grantees tended to be 50. 60 or even 70. They were clearly nice people but that's not what was important. Both programs in my view should be looking for candidates who could be influential in the future. We were able to shift the focus on both programs. USIA found the money and we did it.

Q: Were there any incidents that stick in your mind during that time that got you or the embassy involved?

BREMER: I mentioned a couple of decisions on NATO that really caused us a lot of trouble. A totally different matter was a major tourist bus accident once where a lot of

Americans were killed. That was quite a shock for people, and involved some emergency consular work But that's the kind of thing that happens.

I should have mentioned that Bill Anders, who was the second of the ambassadors, was a tremendous success with the Norwegians because he fit exactly the Norwegian image of a hero. This is a man who had been to the moon. I vividly remember he hosted a reception at the embassy where we had the last survivor of Scott's trip to the North Pole, a Norwegian who had climbed Mount Everest and Bill Anders. I remember the front page of all the papers the next day, "Three Heroes". Anders was also very active -- he took up cross country skiing and that was good. It is almost a national passion for Norwegians. Every one skis. Bill Anders was also often seen out skiing. He did a very good job as ambassador there. He fit what the Norwegian wanted and was a worthy and respected representative of the United States.

Q: I have talked to people who have served in Norway and you know, it seems like everybody shuts down for the weekend and they all head off to the country and either bask in what little sun there is or go skiing.

BREMER: It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of skiing in Norwegian culture. When you went to a reception on Monday, the very first thing someone will ask you is where did you ski yesterday? What kind of wax did you use?" In those days you waxed your skis. Did you use blue or green or was it klister? How was the weather? Skiing was an absolutely essential part of the experience. I remember often skiing on a Saturday or Sunday and along would come the king with his two dogs and his guard behind him. I loved the skiing, being a New Englander. We taught our two young kids to ski there and they still do. And have taught their kids to ski.

But many diplomats, especially those who were from the south -- the Venezuelans, the Brazilians -- were miserable in Norway because they just couldn't get into it. Many Americans on our staff couldn't get into the sport either. I set up a program where we paid a very good skier from our commercial section, a Norwegian, to offer free cross country ski lessons on the golf course just to get our staff out into the world most Norwegians lived in.

Francie and I did a trip along the north coast of Norway in the middle of winter on something called the Haute Route. This is the mail boat that calls in little tiny towns along the fjords north of Tromso, way in the north which have no access by land even in the summer. Everything has to come by sea. This boat comes once a week and drops off the mail, picks up the mail, picks some people up. We did this in the dead of winter, and our sophisticated Oslo friends thought we were crazy. When we got to towns along the way, we'd go call on the mayor and the editor of the newspaper and the head of the labor union. They would say, "This is great because everybody comes here in the summer but if you come in the winter, it shows you are really interested in what our life is like." All of those towns have cross country ski trails that are lighted at night, and we took our skis and we skied all across north Norway in the middle of winter. The skiing and the climate are a very important part of Norwegian life. If you didn't get out and enjoy the winter, it

was a tough assignment which is why I tried to encourage people on our staff to learn to ski. Get out, even if you don't do a lot, just get out and enjoy it.

Q: Well, you left there in '79?

BREMER: Yes, the summer of '79.

Q: Whither?

BREMER: Vice President Mondale visited Norway.

Q: He's of Norwegian ancestry.

BREMER: Yes and he came to visit his ancestral town which is called Mundal. It is one of these towns on the end of a fjord with no land access. Mondale came and did very well. He was enormously popular. During that visit, I had a dinner with Peter Tarnoff who at that time was executive secretary under Secretary Vance. Over dinner we started talking about what was I going to do next and Peter brought up the idea of my coming back and serving as one of his deputies because he was having some turnover in the summer. Long story short, that's what happened. I came back to Washington as deputy executive secretary, working for Peter Tarnoff, in July or August of '79.

Q: How long did you do that?

BREMER: I did that until I was made executive secretary when the new administration, the Reagan administration came into office in January of '81.

Q: What is the executive secretary secretariat? At that time?

BREMER: It started when George Marshall became secretary of state, after the Second World War. He'd been a good army man and a good army chief of staff and had a good understanding of the importance of staff work. He looked around the State Department and said, "This is a bordello. Where is the staffing? How do I know I'm getting the right information as secretary of state?" So he established a rudimentary secretariat to try to coordinate information flow, decision making, follow-up -- implementing a good staff system at the State Department.

That developed in various ways over the 1950s. After the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, it also became apparent the State Department didn't have a 24 hour watch center. That became the operations center which was folded into the executive secretariat. In effect, the secretariat by the time we are talking about in the late '70s, had become what I used to call the vortex or the funnel through which all information coming from within the department was received, reviewed, coordinated and passed along to the top principals -- the secretary of state and his deputies. The Executive secretariat was also designated as the point of contact for all interagency information coming into and leaving the State Department, going off to Treasury, NSC, DOD, wherever. So if the secretariat is doing its

job properly when the secretary of state receives a memo asking for a decision on what to do about the Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua, he has the views of all the relevant parts of the State Department in front of him; not just the Latin American bureau but the political military bureau and maybe the strategic planners, maybe congressional relations, whoever has a stake in the issue.

The executive secretary oversees the secretariat's four departments: the operations center; the secretariat staff, where I had once served; the Information or archiving section; and an administrative support section.

Q: the Secretariat staff was a sort of a breeding ground of

BREMER: A breeding ground for the staff officers. There were about 250 people overall. After Norway, I was one of two Deputy Executive Secretaries.

Q: When you arrived there, this would be the summer?

BREMER: Summer of '79.

Q: How would you describe the relationship between Tarnoff and Secretary Vance and how Tarnoff sort of operated?

BREMER: Peter had a very close relationship with Vance. He had been with Vance from the beginning of the Carter administration. So he had been there more than two years. Peter was one of his closest advisers.

I should say the executive secretary, in those days was actually 'double-hatted'. He was the executive secretary of the Department and therefore running the four divisions I told you about, but he was also special assistant to the secretary and that put him on the secretary's personal staff. Peter had both those titles as I did when I became executive secretary. To the degree the executive secretary is seen in the building as having that special assistant relationship, it increases his bureaucratic authority in the building. Peter had that.

Q: How did he use you? What were you doing? You had been in that same position in a lower category before. How did you find things at that time? Different administration, different people, was there a different atmosphere, a different way of operating?

BREMER: Oh, yes. Under Kissinger the executive secretary and to some degree the secretariat was a bit on the sideline. As I mentioned earlier, Henry's style was to try to keep as much of that within his immediate office as possible. When I worked for Henry, particularly when I was his chief of staff in '75, '76 his personal staff, did a lot of the coordination that the secretariat normally would do, certainly of sensitive stuff. The secretary can run the Department how he wants; that's how Henry wanted to do it, in my view not the best way. By the time I came back in '79, I think the secretariat had regained

a lot of its authority in the bureaucracy, largely because Peter was close to Secretary Vance.

Peter had two deputies; I was responsible for managing the operation center and the information system. His other deputy, Ray Seitz, ran the secretariat line staff and the administrative part. So, each of us oversaw two parts of the secretariat and we tried to focus as well as we could on particular bureaus. In other words, one of us might have a particular relationship with the European Bureau or the Political Military Bureau, Latin American or International Organizations so that we got to know better what their issues were and could better coordinate relations.

I think it worked pretty well when Peter was there. There was a tendency, as there is with most secretaries, for Vance to rely on an inner circle, which included Tarnoff and that was helpful to Peter.

Q: Did you get a feel for the Carter Vance relationship?

BREMER: By the time I got back in mid 1979, there was a fair amount of tension between Vance and Brzezinski, the national security adviser; not actually that surprising. This particularly became clear as we faced the international situation got increasingly tense over the next year and a half. The Sandinistas had just taken over Nicaragua. The Cubans had begun to ship an entire army to Angola. In the fall of '79 we had the takeover of our embassy in Tehran on November 4th and subsequently the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Things got pretty tense internationally.

I can't remember a specific incident but it was clear on a day-to-day basis that relations were uneasy between Vance and Brzezinski. I didn't get a sense that Vance's relations with the president were in any way strained, but they certainly were with Brzezinski.

Q: Sort of by folklore, Brzezinski was very anti-Soviet where Vance was more the lawyer maneuvering between.

BREMER: I think it is fair to say Brzezinski's general foreign policy approach was tougher toward the Soviet Union than Vance's was. Vance was a wonderful human being. I had great admiration for Vance, but I did feel that his approach to foreign policy tended to be rather 'lawyerly'. We have a client here and another on over there -- without a great deal of overarching strategic approach to foreign policy. In that way he reminded me a bit of Bill Rogers who was also a lawyer. Some of those tensions came out both with the takeover of the embassy in Tehran and, in particular, the invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas day of '79.

Q: You say that as early as September there was some signs of about this. I have talked to people who were in Afghanistan at the time. It remained a puzzlement of why the Soviets invaded a communist-run country.

BREMER: It is an interesting question. Having served in Afghanistan, I look back to the coup in 1973 where the King's relatives deposed him and the king's cousin, Mohammed Daoud, took over, it appeared with at least the tacit support of the Soviets. As I mentioned earlier, when I had served in Afghanistan in the '60s there had been a nascent Communist Party headed by Babrak Karmal. Babrak eventually came to power in the coup in 1978. I think the Soviets started down a slippery slope with the coup in 1973. Each time they tried to replace the guy they put in first in the coup in April 1978 installing Babrak and when Hafizullah Amin overthrew Taraki in September of '79, each time it happened the situation didn't get better for them, it got worse.

What was their objective is a very good question. One of the things I remember seeing in September of '79 was a report from another part of the U.S. government about Soviet activities in Kandahar. America's single largest aid programs during the time I had been in Afghanistan were in the south; one was a big agricultural program south of Kandahar and the other building a huge, modern airport in Kandahar. The report that I remember in September '79 in retrospect was one of those things you say "I wish I had paid more attention." It reported about Soviet military or intelligence survey teams doing something at the Kandahar airport. In retrospect, one possible Russian objective of invading Afghanistan, in addition to whatever stabilization they thought they could do in the government in Kabul, might be to find a base for MIGs. At the time Russian MIGs based in the Soviet Union, including Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, could not reach the Gulf of Hormuz .They couldn't get down there and back. But if they were based in Kandahar they were another 3 or 400 miles closer. In theory, you could have a base in Kandahar, at the American built airport, which would allow then to run missions out over the Strait of Hormuz with the MIGs they then had in service. So you could conceive of an argument, a political military argument for the Soviet invasion.

Q: There's also the geriatric answer that the Brezhnev group is getting kind of old and not as with it.

BREMER: Possibly. The Soviets had seen us lose in Vietnam which had been followed by major cuts in our defense budgets, and congressional investigations on our intelligence services. I don't think these things are ever without cost. They had seen Carter reverse two major NATO decisions on the neutron bomb and the B-1 bomber. They had watched the resulting frictions in the alliance. They had seen us, in effect, not react to the takeover of our embassy in Tehran, and the burning of our embassy in Pakistan -- both just 6 weeks before their invasion. Somebody could have made an argument in Moscow that the American government is not going to react and basically we didn't react very strongly if you weigh the effect of the weak sanctions we imposed after their invasion.

A lot of those things presumably went into the discussions in the Kremlin.

Q: Let's talk about the Sandinistas. How did you view and what were you getting from your colleagues about the Sandinistas?

BREMER: I had been to Nicaragua on a visit by Secretary Rogers in ’72 or ’73. Somoza was in power at that time. I was just a staff guy carrying a briefcase around but even so you could tell this was a pretty unattractive government. So although I was certainly not an expert, it was not all that surprising that there were people opposed to him.

Still I have never been much attracted to communists which is what the Sandinistas were. I went with Secretary Vance on a trip to the inauguration of the new Bolivian president. This was some weeks after the Sandinista takeover and one of the Sandinistas was at the ceremony. It might have been Ortega. He and Vance had a photo op together in which they jokingly said they wondered which of them would be in more trouble in their own capital for having their picture taken..

I was uneasy about the Sandinistas. I don’t say that I foresaw that they would become a major factor as they did in Central America and would work as a base to try to subvert El Salvador. Whether we could have done more, I don’t know because I wasn’t in Washington until the matter had been settled by the Sandinista overthrow of Somoza.

Q: Did you get the feel that this was an administration that wasn’t sure of itself or maybe a little too soft on the threat from the Soviets?

BREMER: Yes, but I had that feeling already from my time in Norway as we discussed. Being overseas, it was hard to tell how much of what I saw as weakness was the president or the secretary or something or someone else. Sitting in Oslo, I didn’t know the players in Washington. But I was uneasy, particularly about the approach to NATO which I considered to be soft.

One of the very first things Carter had done when he came into office in ’77 was to propose withdrawing our troops from Korea.

Q: I was on the country team in Korea. This raised hackles on my head, on all our heads.

BREMER: Fortunately, Richard Holbrooke talked him out of it. But that was also a signal that things were not good. The President gave his speech some time after I came back, saying we shouldn’t be motivated by “an inordinate fear of communism.” All of this struck me as a little bit fairyland approach to what I thought was a pretty serious challenge.

Q: How did the op center respond to the taking over of our embassy? This must have really engaged us.

BREMER: Yes, it did, although I tell you I remember more dramatically the attack on the embassy in Islamabad. We got an open line to the embassy from the ops center and I went with Secretary Vance down there. We were talking to somebody in the embassy who was in the communications center on the top floor. The embassy was on fire. He was saying, “The embassy is on fire. I can feel the floor getting hotter. There are gunshots outside.” The Pakistanis had delayed responding to repeated requests for assistance from

the Embassy. It was very hairy for those trapped in a burning Embassy. In the end we finally did get some people in through the roof to get our people out. Somewhere along the line, the communications went out and we didn't know what had happened and then they came back. It was a very dramatic number of hours.

I have no specific memory of being in the Ops Center the day November 4 when the embassy in Tehran was taken

Q: Bruce Laingen was at the Iranian foreign ministry and was in fairly continuous communication.

BREMER: I was almost in that job. When I was in Norway and was not very happy with my DCM situation there, Walt Cutler contacted me. He's an old friend and said he was slated to be ambassador to Tehran. This was before the shah fell, so sometime in '78. Walt asked if I would be interested in being his deputy because I had served in Afghanistan and I still, in those days, knew some Persian. I discussed it with Francie who said, "Absolutely not. You are not going back to that part of the world. No, absolutely not" so I didn't go as DCM. Of course Walt Cutler never got there either.

Q: With the Soviets moving in through the Cubans and all but also Soviets were involved in the Horn of Africa, did you get the feeling that things were tipping the wrong way?

BREMER: I considered those years, even more so now, very dangerous. It really was a dangerous series of events; there was this sequence of steps on NATO, the signal on Korea that was reversed but you had to ask yourself what did the Chinese and Koreans really think our intentions were on the Korean Peninsula and in the region. There was the takeover of Nicaragua, there was the Cubans in Angola, there were Cubans in Yemen, Egyptians and Cubans and in the Horn of Africa. Then there were the major events of the takeover in Tehran and the invasion of Afghanistan. To me it looked pretty dangerous.

I felt that the Russians had drawn the conclusion that they could push out in a lot of different directions.

Q: I think in retrospect it was pretty hairy at that time.

What about the rescue attempt to get our hostages out and the fiasco and resignation of Vance and all? Did you see that playing out?

BREMER: Yes. The reaction of the State Department and Vance to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets was very weak, I thought. The invasion happened on Christmas Day. As it happened, Tarnoff was away and so I was acting executive secretary for the better part of a week or ten days. We tried to put together a package of sanctions. We had done nothing in Tehran. I felt, and said so at the time, that if we had moved some elements of the Fifth Fleet around a little bit, we might have very well scared away the students who had organized the takeover.

The same with the sanctions on Russia. In the end, the main thing we did was boycott the summer Olympics in 1980 which was not a much of a sanction.

Q: No, it wasn't. As a matter of fact, I think there was even talk about doing this in Beijing over human rights and all. It's a stupid move. It means our side doesn't participate.

BREMER: Well, it was about the only thing left when you eliminated any more vigorous action. Then Carter announced his rose garden strategy in early 1980. He wasn't going to leave the White House until the hostage crisis was resolved. This was also weak and silly. It made him look very weak because he effectively turned himself into a hostage.

I didn't know about the rescue thing ahead of time. It was kept very closely; Tarnoff knew about it. I was shocked when it failed. I thought it was to his honor and credit that Vance resigned. I disagreed with him but I thought it was an honorable thing to do. Before the rescue operation Vance told the president that he didn't support it and was going to resign whether it succeeded or failed. This was a brave and honorable course, because if the rescue had succeeded, and he had resigned, he would have looked like a goat. I thought he was wrong and that we should be prepared to use force to free our people.

Something always goes wrong in complex military operations. The word "snafu" comes to mind. In this case, the operation itself was probably too complicated.

Q: Situation normal, all fouled up.

BREMER: Right. The expression comes from an understanding of what normally happens. This operation was too complicated. Helicopters here, going there, people coming into the stadium; it was too complicated. With so many moving pats, something was bound to go wrong and it did. So Vance resigned and it was an honorable thing for him to do since he thought the entire operation was wrong.

The operation was in April and I think Muskie wasn't appointed until the end of the summer, August or something like that.

Q: How did this affect your operations?

BREMER: It was the second time I had been through a change of secretary because I was working for Rogers when he resigned and Kissinger came over. There are two things that happened; obviously from a policy point of view, there is a degree of uncertainty for a period of time because A, we didn't know who the person was going to be in the case of Muskie for some months and B, we didn't know how it was going to affect things.

From a secretariat point of view, the big problem is mobilizing the building to brief the new secretary, getting him ready which involves thousands of pages of briefing materials

that have to be pulled together. Warren Christopher was acting secretary. The Secretariat helped mobilize the bureaucracy to help get Muskie briefed up for what was going to be very intense period. The election was only three months away when he came in. Get him ready on a range of issues that were pretty difficult.

Q: Did you get any impression of Muskie?

BREMER: He was a very nice man and I liked him. There is always awkwardness when people from the legislative branch come into the executive branch . At base they need to learn that that in the executive branch, you execute.
You have to give some speeches but, in the end, you also have to make things happen which is not often how it goes on the Hill. So there is a conceptual difference and Muskie found it, I think, initially, not an easy transition.

Secondly, he was accustomed to the hours on the Hill and on the Hill members tend to show up around 10, 10:30 in the morning and maybe by 5 you are off unless there is some committee thing. It doesn't work that way at the State Department. The secretary doesn't show up at 10 o'clock in the morning; not if he wants to get his work done and play a serious role in policy making. And he will almost certainly be at the office long after 5PM.

So I think he found the adjustment in both respects, both conceptually and from a practical point of view, difficult. He was a very nice, decent man and I liked him but he never really got hold of it. He was only in the post a few months and he didn't put in the hours. He was working for an administration that was really in trouble by that time.

Q: How did this play out for you?

BREMER: I stayed on. Tarnoff stayed on. We all stayed on because this was not a time to leave, abandon ship, obviously. You had to have some continuity and so we stayed on, all three of us: Tarnoff, Seitz and I. When the Republicans won, Tarnoff assumed and pretty much decided that he had been so close to the Democratic administration that he would not stay on; plus he had been there four years. He was tired.

I was approached in late December of 1980 by Woody Goldberg who was Al Haig's staff guy. Goldberg came to my office and asked me what I wanted to do in the new administration. I said that I would do whatever the secretary wanted me to do. He asked if I would be willing to be considered to be executive secretary and I said if that's what the secretary would like, of course I would serve. Then at some point I met with Haig, I think before the inauguration, and Haig asked me to stay on as executive secretary, so I did.

Q: How long were you with Haig?

BREMER: I was with Haig from '81 until he resigned which was about a year and a half later.

Q: Today is November 14, 2008. You had become executive secretary, Muskie left and we are picking up when you took over with the new Reagan administration.

This would be in 1981?

BREMER: Right.

Q: Was there talk about well, let's get a new team in?

BREMER: I had a meeting with Haig before the inauguration and he asked me to stay on or to become executive secretary.

Q: What was the impression you had and your fellow colleagues, a new secretary of state coming in and there is a lot of buzz and gossip and all that and what was sort of the impression of Haig becoming secretary of state?

BREMER: I don't have a memory of it very much, frankly. I by this time had already served four secretaries of state. I was sure there would be a difference in style and everything else.

One of my first jobs was to try to put my own team in place. One of the other deputy executive secretaries, under Peter Tarnoff, was an old friend of mine, Ray Seitz who eventually became ambassador to the Court of St. James. Ray and I had been very close friends for a very long time. Ray had become deputy executive secretary about the same time I had, in the summer of 1979, and I was anxious for him to agree to stay on at least in the interim transition because I needed someone who knew the ropes and who I trusted. Ray agreed to stay on briefly to see me through the interim and I went about trying to find somebody else.

What I remember most about the initial period of Haig was that, and it became public rather quickly, he made an effort immediately to establish with the president that he, Haig, was in charge of foreign policy. I didn't know all the ins and outs of this at the time, but it became clear that Haig had a concern that the president had around him his kitchen cabinet, most of them from California. Most had served the government under Reagan when he was governor. Haig himself having had the experience of serving at the White House under Nixon was quite sensitive to the question of how much authority the White House staff would have versus the cabinet secretaries.

This led him, and in the end he would agree, probably unwisely, to give the president, almost at the inauguration, a memo which he had not shown to me and I don't think had shown to others at the State Department which asserted a very broad scope of authority for Haig. This is important because in the end it is what led to the problems of Haig eventually resigning a year and a half later. This was drafted for him by another colleague who had worked with Haig and Kissinger in the Nixon years, Dick Kennedy, who eventually became under secretary for management.

Q: He was a military officer.

BREMER: Yes. Dick apparently drew up this contentious memo.

Q: There also was the phrase, 'he was a vicar of foreign policy' or something?

BREMER: Well, that was the press's term. It was not Haig's term. Anyway, the story got out that he handed this memo drafted by Dick Kennedy to the president. It immediately was leaked to the press by the White House people whom Haig was intended to sideline. It started things off on a rather shaky start.

Haig wanted to reassert what he felt was the lost influence of the State Department over the interagency process of foreign policy lost during the Carter years. I think his assessment was that in the struggles between Brzezinski and Cy Vance, State had come out second. There was some truth in that. State had lost some of its influence. Haig wanted to be sure the mechanisms for interagency consideration of major foreign policy issues were chaired by the State Department, not chaired by the NSC, as had been the case under Kissinger when he was National Security adviser.

So we went working with the State assistant secretaries to identify the working groups that would be set up and establishing these interagency groups, usually chaired by the deputy assistant secretary. This too, in retrospect, had a negative effect on the way the White House saw things. They saw this as consistent with an effort by Haig to become "the vicar" of foreign policy, whatever the term was. It certainly set things off on a very difficult period.

Then we had the assassination attempt on Reagan.

Q: When you came on, Haig of course, had been in this almost, served in this paranoiac White House under Nixon and all. Were you all, I am speaking of you and the others, or talking to Haig's counselors, saying, you know, these political types have a completely different view? The military wants a nice line of command and what you do and it makes good sense but this foreign policy is sort of a political toy which you can play with too and you don't want to take that away or at least give them a chance to do their

BREMER: Yes, well, as my relations got close to Haig over the months, I had a number of conversations with him about the need to be more careful about how he approached the problem. He was taking to calling them the three musketeers at the White House, Baker, Deaver and Meese. Baker was not part of the California clique but he was there.

Behind all this it became clearer that there loomed the question of the Reagan succession. You had a vice president, Vice President Bush, who considered himself to be a potential candidate. I think at that point probably Jim Baker saw himself as a potential candidate and they all saw Haig as a potential candidate. So there was some pretty big politics behind a lot of this bureaucratic skirmishing.

Q: Did Haig when he came in, one of the stories of the Foreign Service is when George Marshall became secretary of state back in '50 or so that he established the executive secretariat. He wanted things done in a military way and Haig being a military man, but had been also very much at the center of the political circle under Nixon. Did he have a military approach?

BREMER: He had a military man's appreciation for good staffing. He believed as I do that an orderly process to bring decisions forward to the secretary and the president was on the whole likely to produce better decisions. So he was very supportive. Haig, much along the lines of what is written about Marshall, believed that when he made a decision he ought to have the benefit of the advice of any interested parts of the State Department. If Latin America had an issue, and the Europeans had an interest, then both of their views should be heard -- the famous clearance process. He believed that the decision-making process should be orderly; he did not encourage end runs, and that helped strengthen the executive secretariat's role because that was our role, to try to make things more orderly.

Q: So you've got hold of the controls. How did you find the State Department, particularly geographic bureaus but other ones were responding to this new way?

BREMER: The State Department, in my experience, wants the secretary of state to succeed and generally speaking, they want him to be influential with the president. Under Secretary Rogers, the first secretary I served, it was quite clear that Nixon and Rogers didn't have a personal rapport, that Nixon had put Rogers in State precisely because he wanted to downgrade State for a whole variety of reasons. I think, in general, when Haig came in people thought "well, here is a breath of fresh air. He's energetic." Muskie had not been a very active secretary. He'd only been secretary for six months. So the department in general welcomed him. They welcomed the idea that the State Department should play the central coordinating role on major foreign policy issues.

Q: Was Judge Clark the …

BREMER: He was the deputy secretary.

Q: Who was the national security adviser?

BREMER: Richard Allen.

Q: Who left rather quickly?

BREMER: He was there a year.

Q: In a way, it seemed like an advantageous position because Haig had a name, he had a reputation and a very solid reputation and the national security adviser was somebody you had to think what his name was. Did this seem to be working out well or was this triumvirate or whatever you want to call it of Deaver and Baker and Meese, were they was this a competition for the soul of Ronald Reagan, at the beginning?

BREMER: At the beginning there were unfavorable stories about Haig's trying to seize power. But it quieted down a bit. Then we had the assassination attempt on Reagan. Haig called me in to say that he thought he should get over to the White House right away, which he did. I went and stayed with Bill Clark, who was deputy secretary, and we were on an open line to the White House.

As he has written, when Haig got to the situation room, he found, unbeknownst to anybody else beforehand, that Secretary of Defense Weinberger had raised the defense condition from DEFCON 4 to DEFCON 3, which is a fairly major upgrading of the status particularly of our nuclear forces all around the world. Haig knew from his experience as SACEUR and time in the military, that the Russians would pick up this change of alert status immediately. They would understand that we had suddenly done something major with our forces all around the world.

It is important to remember the atmosphere of early 1981. We had a newly elected, conservative president who was well known for his strong views about the Soviet Union. He had been elected on a platform that was quite clear on his policy to build up our defense and to confront the Soviets. Haig, I think correctly, judged that there was a real risk that the increased alert would be misinterpreted by the Russians. At this point we didn't know if the president would live or die. Vice President Bush was not in Washington, he was on an airplane in Texas. Haig concluded that it was important to ensure the Russians understood that a responsible officer was trying to organize the international aspects of a major crisis.

So when he heard what Weinberger had done, Haig ran upstairs from the sit room to the press room. He got up there out of breath and went to the podium and said, "I am in control." He has been ridiculed and criticized for this. Actually it was, in my view, the right thing to do; he was trying to send a message to the Russians that they weren't about to get attacked.

Q: This was a young man named John Hinckley who did this, a real nut.

BREMER: Right, but we didn't know much at that time and we didn't know what kind of problem we had. We had no vice president in town. It was a very difficult time.

Then once things calmed down, the president lived. This then became another part of the narrative of Haig being overbearing in his approach, which I think was not justified, in this case. I think he was trying to do the right thing.

Q: Did you get any feel as Haig was getting his feet wet, his relations with Caspar Weinberger, secretary of defense?

BREMER: They became rocky; I can't remember if they were already so in this first quarter of '81. They became rocky as they always do between the secretary of state and

the secretary of defense, they always do. There are always quite legitimate bureaucratic reasons why these two positions take a different perspective on international affairs.

They became more strained later although the real strains came between Shultz and Weinberger. They weren't as bad under Haig but there were problems.

Q: How did you find being executive secretary, were there changes or did you, you had been around for a long time. Did you see things you wanted to improve?

BREMER: Well, when you are the executive secretary, you are basically the house plumber. You're making sure the pipes all work, don't freeze up. It was, I thought, advantageous to the State Department to have a secretary of state who was energetic and who, in my view, had a good solid grasp of geopolitics. Because of his background, he knew the world. It was good that State was going to play a more active role.

It was a hectic period. There was the assassination attempt on the Pope shortly after the president's. Sadat was then killed. Another major event was the Russian occupation of Poland in the winter of '81. There were problems with the Europeans. It is hard to say where to begin.

Q: Let's talk about, again from your perspective. You've got a lot of things happening but how about with European affairs? In the first place, I would think the State Department would have a problem that they had gone through with Ronald Reagan coming on. I can remember, I was consul general in Naples at the time, trying to explain to my Italian colleagues, this guy was not just a movie actor, that he had been running a state which had a gross national product equivalent to Italy's. There was a problem with Reagan and also Reagan was a problem to himself in that he was used to talking off the cuff and all that. At your level did you see efforts to make this man appreciated by the rest of the world?

BREMER: It obviously was a theme. We saw a lot in the cables coming in from our posts overseas and in the press but I had no particular responsibility to respond to it. Mine was an internal job, not an external job. I remember, the press was reporting that he was just a grade B cowboy; the Europeans were saying that. We would send memos to the President and react to his decisions or questions.

I remember one big issue was arms sales to Taiwan. President Reagan had been in the part of the Republican Party that really never forgave Nixon for opening to China. So this was a sensitive issue. One weekend the President was up at Camp David, we sent him a hefty memo on some element of Taiwan; I think it was arms sales. It came back down from Camp David. Haig was traveling and Bill Clark was acting. I remember Clark called me to his office and showed me page after page of notes from Reagan on this memorandum. I didn't necessarily agree with his criticisms but, it was clear that this was not a fool we had as president. It was very clear that he understood what had been proposed, and he didn't like it. He after all had been out talking about foreign policy for

25 years before he became president. Over time it was pretty clear to me that Reagan's instincts were good.

Q: Yes, I think time has proven this.

BREMER: Yes, there was criticism. I heard much more about it when I was eventually ambassador; then I heard it all the time.

Q: Did you have or sense a problem of turning the State Department soul around or whatever you want to call it? It had been with the Carter years and had a hell of a problem with human rights and all but it takes time but all of a sudden there is a 90 degree turn into Reagan.

BREMER: When you see it from the perspective of the secretary's office, you probably don't hear all the grinding of teeth and wailing that is going on down on the fourth or fifth floor. I am sure there were plenty of people who were just discomforted by the change. But then the State Department tends to be a pretty disciplined organization. It may not be quite military; it tends to bitch and moan and then say, "Aye, aye, Sir." It was a change, but hard to judge from where I was sitting how hard a change.

Q: I think too as opposed to the military there should be a certain challenge in the State Department to policy by saying, "This is fine but it's not going to work."

BREMER: Yes, here are the consequences. Haig listened to argument. He didn't throw people out of the office. He listened to argument, he could be persuaded. I am sure some people in the Department found the shift from Carter to Reagan difficult as people find every change of administration difficult.

Q: Probably even more difficult was from Nixon or Ford to Carter.

BREMER: Yes, although my own personal most difficult was from Reagan to Bush, but that's a different story.

Q: Did you go on any trips with Haig?

BREMER: No. My approach to the executive secretariat was that my job was to be in Washington and try to help keep the State Department plumbing working for the secretary wherever he was. I had seen Tom Pickering travel as executive secretary under Kissinger and it was a mistake. If the executive secretary goes along on a trip, there's nobody really back home making the place go and he gets sucked into the immediate policy questions. I would have one of my two deputies travel with the secretary.

Q: Who were your deputies?

BREMER: Initially Ray Seitz who stayed on and Ambassador Al Adams who was a colleague who had been involved in Vietnam and was a colleague from the Kissinger/NSC days.

Q: What was your impression of Judge Clark as deputy secretary?

BREMER: Judge Clark was a Californian. In terms of personality, he was different from Haig. The president and the California guys wanted him over at State to keep an eye on Haig. Clark was probably the closest of all the Californians to the president. When Clark spoke about talking over an issue, the verb he used was "round tabling it" -- Let's "roundtable it." That's an interesting image because there is no head of a round table. A different approach from Haig who was a retired four star general. He would be at the head of the table. Clark always talked about a round table. Clark had, as he admitted, little foreign policy experience but his value to Haig and to the State Department was his relationship with the president. I used to hear from Foreign Service officers complain that "Judge Clark doesn't know anything about my issue". And I would say, "Listen guys, Judge Clark is the guy, any time, day or night, picks up the phone and talks to his friend, Ron, and gets something done. That's pretty good for the State Department." In particular, Clark had the central role in the appointment of ambassadors, or at least the nomination of ambassadors to the president. That's pretty important too. If we could persuade Clark that Mr. X or Ms. Y was the best candidate to go to No-name-istan, it would happen. He would go to the White House and just brush aside the White House personnel people who always had their candidate. So Clark provided a useful channel of communication directly to the president and to the White House staff to whom he was close. He could be used and was used by Haig as a channel back over to the White House staff on various issues.

The role of deputy secretary is extremely difficult to define. It is very rare that they play an important policy role. Their role is mostly that of helping manage the building or manage the White House or if he has a particular background or something. It's not an easy role. On the whole, I think Clark did it well.

Q: How did Clark and Haig fit?

BREMER: They fit pretty well, actually. They had an easy going relationship. Clark has a wonderful personality, very warm and engaging guy and he always had his good humor to get Haig through tough times. I don't want to speak for him, but Haig was smart enough to understand that Clark's job was to keep an eye on him and he could turn that around. A good counter intelligence guy knows how to use an agent and in the end Clark was helpful, although he clearly saw the warning signs of all the problems coming from the White House staff.

Q: Did you get information about what was going on at the NSC? How important was the NSC during this period?

BREMER: During this period the NSC was not as important as it had been under Kissinger. We did succeed in establishing a fairly significant role for the State Department on interagency matters. I don't remember there being any major blow ups about the NSC. We had the usual range of problems with the Defense Department again.

Q: Leading up to the dismissal or resignation of Haig, was this a buildup situation?

BREMER: Yes, it was. It went all the way back to the famous Kennedy memo and the Time Magazine "Vicar" article and "I am in control". It reached its apogee during the Falkland War, which was in the spring of '82, April, I think. Our good friends and allies, the British, shipped their navy halfway across the world, quite rightly in my view, to throw the Argentines off the Falkland Islands.

Haig saw the potential danger of letting this develop into war. He wanted to avoid the war and made a decision -- which you can justify or criticize -- to personally engage in what amounted to shuttle diplomacy between Argentina and the UK. I believe that some of the White House senior staff saw this as a high wire act, that Haig was going to get his, Nobel Prize or whatever he was going to get and this would position him to run for President. Perhaps that's the way Haig saw it too. I don't know.

He didn't succeed. The war happened.

Q: I remember this plane with no windows.

BREMER: Yes, I can't remember if that was the Falklands or if that was part of the next trip he made but, in any case, rather than getting the plane the secretary of state normally gets, which in those days was a modified 707, for some reason he got a tube with no windows.

It was a calculated effort to put him in his place and it worked. It worked in the sense that the tensions had been rising. Haig's view was that the senior White House staff people who were not knowledgeable about foreign policy, they really didn't understand it. He felt that by this constant pinprick attack against him, they were not serving their country well. One can make an argument that in some cases this was true. The trouble was that Haig, unfortunately, let himself be provoked by this and it got more and more tense.

I remember many times he would come back from some meeting at the White House, call me and the relevant assistant secretary in for a debrief. Haig would tense, smoking heavily, jiggling his right leg up and won. He would then criticize the White House staff -- " These people don't know this or that" or "they don't know what they are talking. Everybody would leave and I would stay afterward and say, "Mr. Secretary, you really ought not to say things like that about the White House staff in front of a lot of people. If you want to unload on me, fine. I don't talk to the press. I am here to try to make this place work for you but if you say things like that it will get back to the White House." And sooner or later the stories get in the press, as they always do.

These series of provocations and pinpricks, in effect, worked; the windowless plane message was clear. It was pretty clear at that point that Haig couldn't get around the White House staff; he couldn't defeat them in a way that allowed him to conduct foreign policy the way he thought it should be done. I don't know what the president's view was, but in any case he certainly accepted his resignation.

Q: During the Haig time, did you get involved from sort of your unique role, in any of the diplomatic initiatives or episodes?

BREMER: I wasn't personally involved because I didn't have any line responsibility. Other than that, I was involved in everything.

Q: Are there any that occurred during this Haig time that stuck in your mind as the observer?

BREMER: There was an ongoing discussion with the Europeans about what our position should be vis-à-vis, the Soviet Union. There were very large nuclear freeze, anti-nuclear movements, particularly in Europe. A lot of discussion in the alliance about the decision to deploy Pershing cruise missiles to balance the SS-20s the Russians were putting in.

Q: Just from your observation, did you feel that we were pursuing a reasonable course in foreign policy?

BREMER: I did. I am a Republican and I was sympathetic to Reagan's general world view. I thought he was right about the Soviet Union. It was a real threat to us and to the people of Europe and I felt that we needed to confront them. To give him his credit, Carter started the military buildup in '79 and Reagan continued it, But Reagan did it with more vigor.

Haig shared that view. That was Haig's great strength; he did share the general view that we had to continue the policy that every administration had followed since '45 of containing and eventually rolling back the Soviets.

Q: Did you find that Haig, since he had been SACEUR, a problem come up which might go to the assistant secretary for European affairs. I know whoever it is, I can call. In other words, he used his particular ties that he built up over the years.

BREMER: Yes, I am sure it happened. He did know particularly the European leadership, not just the military leadership, because SACEUR is basically a political job. He knew most of the prime ministers and key players in Europe and was at ease with them. When he went to the regular NATO ministerial meetings twice a year, he pretty much knew everybody. He was good at that.

Q: How did his resignation happen from your perspective?

BREMER: Shultz had been asked by the president at some point to undertake a mission to Europe before Haig left. This was ’81 or ’82. In retrospect, but only in retrospect, it appears that he maybe he was being tried out in “New Haven” before he came down to “Broadway”. Whether there was a mysterious hand behind that at the White House, , if someone had decided sooner or later they would have to get rid of Haig, I don’t know. Anyway, the administration was ready with Shultz quite quickly. I think Haig resigned in late April or early May and Shultz was named rather quickly.

I can’t say that I was surprised that Haig resigned because I had seen tension building for virtually 18 months and in particular towards the end with the famous windowless airplane and so forth. None of us knew what to expect. I basically stayed on. When Shultz came in, he asked to see me. I told him that if he wanted to have his own team here, he should do that. He asked me to stay, so I stayed.

Q: What sort of reputation did Shultz come in with?

BREMER: My impression was that he came with a good reputation. I think it is right to say, a larger number of Foreign Service officers would have heard of Al Haig than would have heard of George Shultz. Shultz’s previous positions had been largely out of the international affairs and he had been out of office for, by that time, six years, He had been running Bechtel.. At least people who were involved in political/military affairs had heard of Haig and had some contact with him as SACEUR.

Q: We’ve known later secretaries of state, particularly Baker sort of arrived with their own cadre and all that.

BREMER: Shultz did not.

Q: Did Haig arrive with a group?

BREMER: He arrived with Woody Goldberg who was his chief of staff who basically had been for a long time. He brought in Dick Kennedy to be undersecretary for management. He had Clark given to him by the White House staff. His undersecretary for political affairs, but Haig did not bring a big group of people. He brought a couple. Bud McFarland came as his counselor and Bud, who had been a Marine colonel, was another person from the Nixon/Kissinger NSC staff. Larry Eagleburger eventually became undersecretary for political affairs and he had known Larry also from the Kissinger years.

Q: So it wasn’t a tight group?

BREMER: It was not a tight group. Since he had been involved in foreign policy, Haig had a pretty good and respectful view of the Foreign Service. He was a serviceman himself and saw Foreign Service as service. He understood the importance of being sure to pull up from the building whatever information there was in the building to help him make decisions. He was a career military man and so he looked at orderly decision making, which depended on good staff work, as essential to success.

Shultz came with nobody. He didn't even have a spear catcher. He just arrived.

Q: How did you start working with Shultz? What did he want from you and how did he seem to operate?

BREMER: One thing I forgot to say about the Reagan years before we leave it. When the assassination attempt happened, the immediate question was, what do we do about telling posts? How do we set up a task force? It turned out we had no documentation in the State Department, not surprisingly. When Kennedy had been killed there was only an operations center. Nobody kept any records of what State had done in 1963. So within an hour of the assassination attempt I asked Dick Kennedy, undersecretary for management, to head a task force to try to figure out what we should do. Dick's team drafted a slew of telegrams, -- first flash telegrams to all diplomatic posts saying what was going on. Obviously, stating that there was going to be continuity, the usual kinds of messages you would expect. We sent out a number of updates as information came to us. When the dust settled, we wrote a manual the unlikely event an administration had to go through that again.

It was the kind of thing that falls to the secretariat when there is a crisis.

Q: I was consul general in Naples and the next thing I knew I had the mayor of Naples, who was a communist coming to express his concern.

BREMER: With Shultz, as with every change of the secretary, the most important thing the secretariat can do is try to get his briefing papers ready for his confirmation so that he is up to speed as much as he can get, at least on the major issues. So we worked with Shultz. Basically the State Department is a paper mill -- you don't have to ask for papers in the State Department. You do sometimes have to tell them to stop. Anyway, everybody mobilized. Every bureau writes up all of its favorite subjects and shoots them up and briefing books are prepared and so forth. I don't remember any details but there were obviously lots and lots of issues that Shultz needed to get up to speed on. He would meet with people and talk about it and then of course, we had 'murder boards' before he had his hearings.

Q: You might explain what a 'murder board' is.

BREMER: Well, a 'murder board' is a Washington tradition where before a confirmation hearing or a hearing of any kind, on the Hill or sometimes before a press conference, a group of staff will come in and ask the tough questions to the secretary; all the nasty questions you can think of and see if he is ready to answer them and how he answers them. I have been through a number of them myself, both as a murderer and a 'murderee'. It is a very useful device and because it surfaces things. The secretary might give his answer to a nasty question and some counselor might say, "Well, if you say that, here's the impact". So it is very useful.

We did a lot of that with Shultz. He was confirmed rather quickly as I recall. I think before the summer was out.

At some point after Shultz became secretary, the president gave his famous speech on the Strategic Defense Initiative or SDI which was sort of sprung on the State Department and on our allies.

Q: And on the military too.

BREMER: It turned out to be a brilliant idea. But I remember spending a very long night with Larry Eagleburger and the secretary trying to figure out what to do. The president was going to give the speech the next day and we had to somehow alert at least our close allies what was coming.

One person Shultz did choose very carefully was his deputy, Ken Dam. Ken Dam is a real expert on international trade and somebody Shultz had known from his days in the Department of Commerce or Labor.

Shultz's personality is very different from Haig's. He was a very good listener; he would listen very carefully and speak very carefully. He would take an idea or memo and just sort of sit back. I remember him often just looking out his window, obviously thinking about things. This was not Haig's style; Haig's style was to get down to it, read the memo, ask some questions and make a decision and move on. Shultz was much more professorial. By the end of his time six years he had clearly developed great respect for the professionals at the State Department, which was reciprocated.

Q: In my interviews it comes out as probably the most admired secretary of state in the whole course of an interviews I have had, maybe with the exception of Dean Acheson but that was way back.

BREMER: He was certainly admired. He was a real heavyweight in the administration. The circumstances under which Haig left put the Department in a difficult position bureaucratically. We had lost Haig who had asserted, perhaps too strongly, State's central role. Haig was gone and one had to assume that this probably was going to leave a bad taste in the mouth of the president and his advisers about the State Department. So there was a credibility problem and Shultz was able to reestablish credibility just by the force of his intellect and seriousness.

Q: We have of course this famous relationship between Caspar Weinberger and George Shultz. They really didn't like each other. They didn't agree but often when you have your two principals of departments or anything else disagreeing and the government has to go on, it develops a whole framework underneath the unofficial one of how to make this work. Did you find this going on with the Pentagon and did you have any connections to it?

BREMER: Under Carter a system had been set up where Secretary Brown who was at the Pentagon, Vance and Brzezinski every week would have lunch, the three of them. The NSC staff and the executive secretary staff would set up an agenda that would be agreed by the principals. Then papers would be produced and usually, in the Carter administration, one assistant secretary would also attend the luncheon and report back to the executive secretary what happened. So we tried to follow, more or less, that model in the Reagan administration. It is an arguable case whether is a good thing or a bad thing for government if the secretary of state and the secretary of defense have lunch every week.
Haig had started that with Weinberger. Allen as I recall was not involved in those luncheons. It was a bilateral lunch.

Under Haig and Weinberger it was not as big a problem; under Shultz and Weinberger it became a problem. They had known each other in business before and there must have been some history back there.

There were obviously lots of communications at the assistant secretary level. The problem between State and Defense was exacerbated by the fact that there were two assistant secretaries who were also at loggerheads; Richard Perle at the Pentagon doing what was then called International Security Affairs, or ISA and Rick Burt at the State Department doing Europe. It wasn't just that they disagreed; they had a very important issue which was the implementation of a NATO dual track decision taken in 1978 to deploy cruise missiles unless the Russians didn't deploy SS-20s.. This was sort of the big issue in U.S./European relations, apart from Soviet gas which also became an issue about that time.

Q: You are talking about commercial gas, not military gas?

BREMER: Yes. In the case of State-Defense relations, I don't remember if it was tense right away with the Pentagon; but it certainly developed that way and it developed that way pretty quickly.

Q: I am interviewing Beth Jones and she is talking about how she would have to have a meeting at 3 o'clock in the afternoon to get all the unanswered requests from the Pentagon, which all went up to Rumsfeld to get them cleared so she had to go to Powell almost once a day for him to call Rumsfeld. It was a very, very difficult situation.

BREMER: That's a slightly different problem. I saw a bit of that from my most recent experience in Iraq, but it was a different problem. There you had the secretary of defense basically instructing his staff not to work with the interagency system.

Shultz established himself as a serious professional, calming influence on the bureaucratic problems that had come up during Haig's time.

Q: Did Schulz zero in on certain things or pretty much economic things or Europe or the Middle East or something and turn other things over to deputies?

BREMER: It is very hard for the secretary to figure out what the deputy's job is. It is up to the deputy to figure out what his job is. It is not an easy job. The under secretary for political affairs and the under secretary for management are all pretty clear; the deputy is less clear and it is not like being a DCM at an embassy. It is just very complicated.

When Dam was deputy, he is one of the country's leading experts on international trade, GATT, and he's written books on GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). It was an area of interest to Shultz but that was one he left largely to Ken.

Shultz had a better understanding of the economic dimensions of foreign policy than any of the secretaries I worked with -- not surprisingly, given his background. He had worked in economic policy. So, yes, he paid more attention to that than other secretaries.

Q: How long had you been executive secretary?

BREMER: When he came I had been there about a year and a half and then I stayed another year and a half, roughly.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover?

BREMER: At a certain point Francie said "you need to get out of there." I had been doing this too long. But I also knew I wasn't likely to get out of there unless I had someone around that I knew Shultz would be comfortable making executive secretary. He didn't want to waste his time looking around and I knew -- it's an old rule in life -- if you don't have a successor it is hard to get out. Soon after Shultz arrived the Israelis invaded Lebanon; they moved all the way up to Beirut. During that crisis, the country director, Charlie Hill, had often come up to brief Shultz and had impressed him greatly. Charlie was sort of like Shultz. He's very thoughtful and very knowledgeable. So I started my plotting to leave the secretariat. At this time, my hold-over deputy, Ray Seitz, was getting ready to move on too. So I asked Charlie Hill to come up to be my deputy. I had it in mind that after a few months I would go to Shultz ask to leave. This would be possible if I could suggest to him that Charlie become executive secretary. That is how it worked out.

Charlie did not stay very long as executive secretary because Shultz found him so valuable he wanted him as his backroom guy. So Charlie moved from executive secretary to become Shultz's closest adviser.

Q: Before we leave that, there was this Haig and Ariel Sharon and did Haig give the red light to Sharon? Did any of that pass into your periphery?

BREMER: As far as I know it didn't happen. I don't remember what Haig said in his book.

Q: Did the Israeli invasion of Lebanon during this period, '82, wasn't it? Did that affect you? Did you get involved at all in this whole thing?

BREMER: The problem of being executive secretary you are involved in everything; you are not involved as a substantive officer. Phil Habib was brought in to go off as a special envoy. I think we had to send a team to support him. That's the kind of thing we did. I think the invasion happened just shortly before Haig resigned because I know the crisis was in full bore when Shultz came in.

Q: That didn't have any particular different impact than everything else?

BREMER: No.

Q: We are coming to the time when you became ambassador to the Netherlands. How did this come about? This is usually a political appointment.

BREMER: I had made the transition from Vance to Muskie to Haig to Shultz and was working as Shultz's special assistant and executive secretary in 1982 and 1983. At this time I had the background of having served in Europe in Norway and spoke Norwegian. The assistant secretary for Europe, Rick Burt, approached me with the idea of going to Europe as an ambassador. Shultz also spoke to me about it and he initially focused on Denmark because I spoke Norwegian. But as I looked into it and talked to both the secretary and Rick Burt, Rick argued that the Netherlands would be more important because of the problems we were having getting the Dutch to accept the deployment of Cruise missiles.

The strategic context was that in the mid 1970s the Russians had begun deploying intermediate range, or theatre, nuclear missiles, the SS-20s, in the Warsaw Pact countries. The deployments threatened our European allies and raised an important question about the credibility of the American "nuclear umbrella" over our allies. That is, would America be prepared to respond with our strategic nuclear forces in the even the Soviets attacked an ally with theatre, or tactical, nuclear weapons. Thus, it was an issue that went to the heart of the NATO Article V commitment of "one for all". That is no doubt why the Soviets deployed the SS-20s, as a way of breaking NATO.

In 1978, NATO took the so-called "two track decision" which called for counter deployment of American intermediate range missiles, Pershings, onto selected NATO counties. The decision also declared the Alliance's willingness to negotiate with the Soviets the reduction or elimination of both sides theater or intermediate nuclear forces (INF). Five NATO countries agreed to station the Pershings on their territory. By early 1983, four of the five countries "deploying countries", as they were called in Europe, had gone along and agreed to take these missiles. The Dutch were the only deploying country holding out. It was a key issue for American policy and I felt it looked like a more challenging place to be than Denmark. So it came about that on Shultz's recommendation the president nominated me for that position in the spring of 1983.

Q: Did you have any feeling that you were nudging aside some starry eyed aspirant for the job?

BREMER: There may have been some campaign contributors angling for the job but I never heard anything about other candidates. I was succeeding another Foreign Service officer, Bill Dyess, who had been the State Department spokesman at the beginning of the Reagan administration. The way it looked from Washington, Bill was pushing rather too openly for the deployment of missiles. There's no question we wanted them to take the missiles, but he was doing it in a way that was viewed by people in Washington as counterproductive because the Dutch are notoriously touchy. Shultz's seemed to want to have a steady pair of hands in the Netherlands for what was becoming more and more important as an issue.

Q: This shows when the going gets tough, you go to a professional. It makes sense.

How did you prepare to go there?

BREMER: First Francie and I started studying Dutch. It turned out Norwegian was an advantage in doing that. I read briefing papers, talked to all the former American ambassadors to the Netherlands that I could lay hands on; Bill Middendorf -- who had been Nixon's Ambassador -- others. I did the usual round of talks with people in the CIA, Pentagon, Treasury and preparing for hearings.

Q: Were there any interest groups that were particularly important? Not just on the defense side, but Holland, Michigan people or something?

BREMER: There were a number of groups representing the Dutch American community. There was the Netherlands America foundation based in New York. The American business community had important interests in the Netherlands. At this time, the United States was the largest foreign investor in the Netherlands and the Netherlands was the largest foreign investor in the United States, largely because of the holdings of Shell Oil and Phillips. Already in the '80s the Dutch were investing tens of millions of dollars of pension funds into American real estate much of it in Atlanta and Florida. So there was a very strong business connection between our countries. I spoke to a number of businessmen, both American, Dutch-American and Dutch before I went over there and that turned out to be a very important part of the job.

Q: Other than the missile thing, were there any other areas that were areas that were simmering or a problem?

BREMER: On the economic side of U.S. - European relations, we were still feeling our way about how we related to the European Community as it was then called. The Dutch were founding members not only of that, but of the European Coal and Steel organization back in the '50s. The Dutch along with the British were by far the most liberal -- in the classic economic sense of the word -- governments inside the EC. The Dutch were an important source for indirect American influence into the EC because they were willing

to talk about what was going on in the EC. We and they shared a general liberal outlook on economic policy, open economic trade and in general the principles of a liberal order. The Netherlands is a trading country, it has been for centuries. In addition to the American/Dutch commercial relationship, there was an important economic relationship that involved our ability to talk to the Dutch in a very frank way, confidentially, about what was going on behind the scenes in the European Community. Those were the three main things; Cruise missiles by far the most important, then the U.S. - Dutch commercial interaction and then U.S. - Dutch economic relations. Those were the three areas.

Q: Norway was not in the European Community?

BREMER: No.

Q: What were you getting from your contacts and talking about this not early but middle period of the European Economic Union or European Union? Was there concern, just quiet anticipation of this as being maybe either a great thing or a commercial and perhaps political rival to the U.S.?

BREMER: At that time I think views in Washington were mixed. I think it was generally viewed as being in America's strategic interest for the Europeans to be united because our main problem in the early '80s was countering the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. It was generally understood it would be useful if our partner, Europe, had both political power and an economic dimension. The economic dimension being some kind of unity in the European Community as it was then called. At that time there were a couple of concerns: one was as the European Community developed its mechanisms and institutions, they might progressively exclude the United States from their deliberations. This became more of an issue in my next job when I came back as ambassador at large for counterterrorism.

The second concern was actually quite interesting as we talk in 2008. There was a legitimate concern on the part of the American government that the Europeans were too eager to do large scale commercial deals on energy with the Soviet Union. In 1982, before I went to the Netherlands, the president was concerned enough about this to ask Ambassador Galbraith, our ambassador to France, to make a trip around Europe to try to point out to the Europeans the potential danger of becoming over reliant on Soviet energy sources, particularly gas. The Europeans didn't take kindly to that view. I must say, now looking back 25 years later, I think they should have thought more carefully about it because they are certainly much more dependent on Russian gas now than they ever were on Soviet gas.

Q: How did your Senate hearings go?

BREMER: They were fine. I don't even remember them, they were so quick. I think there were probably two senators there. It was not a controversial appointment.

Q: You were in the Netherlands from when to when?

BREMER: July of 1983 until late August of 1986.

Q: What was sort of the political situation in the Netherlands when you went there in 1983?

BREMER: It was extremely complicated as it always is in the Netherlands. The Dutch have legitimate claim to being one of the oldest representative governments in the world. They can't quite go back as far as Magna Carta but they go pretty close to it. They are a rather contentious lot so that there are lots of parties. It reminded me of the political situation in Israel where you have lots and lots of parties. There were 8 or 9 parties in the Tweede Kamer, the lower house of parliament when I got there. It was a coalition government. The prime minister was from the Christian Democratic Party and they were in coalition with the liberals, the Dutch Liberal Party, the VVD as it's called. The VVD was solidly in favor of NATO and of deploying the cruise missiles. But the Christian Democrats were deeply divided on this key issue. They were split into at least two factions. One faction represented by the foreign minister, Hans van den Broek, was very strongly pro-Atlanticist, pro-NATO and very much in favor of making this extremely controversial decision to deploy Cruise missiles.

The minister of defense, Job de Ruiter, was from a softer wing of the Christian Democratic Party. They were in favor of NATO, but opposed putting in the cruise missiles. Then there was the prime minister, Ruud Lubbers, whose position was never entirely clear as to which of these two courses he favored. These three men were the key decision makers though there were lots of others.

Q: The prime minister was?

BREMER: Ruud Lubbers. One of the things I learned very quickly was that the Dutch system is quite different from other parliamentary systems. The Dutch prime minister has no direct authority over the other ministers and explicitly not over the foreign minister. This became a problem at some point because Washington kept sending letters from the president to the prime minister about cruise missiles. The first time this happened, I delivered the letter to the Prime Minister and as a courtesy, gave a copy to the foreign minister. The foreign minister took several layers of skin off me the first time pointing out that, under the Dutch constitution, he was personally responsible for foreign policy, not the prime minister, which is true. I had to explain this to Washington. I don't think I ever fully succeeded explaining that fact to Washington. From then on I always delivered the original letter to the foreign minister, and copies to the Prime and Defense Ministers.

Q: Looking at how one deals with a different bureaucracy, could the president write to the defense minister or the foreign minister? Would it be Shultz writing to the foreign, how did?

BREMER: We didn't use written letters that often. What we finally wound up doing is I would call on the foreign minister first and tell him what was going on and then tell him,

unless he had some objection, I intended to inform the prime minister and as necessary, the defense minister. I basically handled it that way, whether my instructions told me to or not.

Q: You really had to keep running from stool to stool to keep everybody informed.

BREMER: Yes, and beyond that, those three were just the top of a very complicated lay down of MPs, mayors, governors throughout the country, politicians who were taking sides on this. This was a very hot political issue all over the country. Francie was reminding me this morning that shortly after I got to the Netherlands, The Hague was the site of the largest peace demonstration in European history. I think even to date, no demonstration has been bigger. We had anti-Cruise missile, anti-nuclear, anti-American demonstrators bused in from all over Europe, 750,000 of them, who mustered in a big park in central The Hague and then marched past the American embassy. It took something like 8 1/2 hours for all these people to march past the embassy, all of them opposed to deploying the Cruise missiles. Fortunately it went off peacefully.

Again, the strategic context was that four of the five deploying countries had agreed to take the missiles, so effectively, the Russians had made the decision they could break apart the unity on this issue, and perhaps even more broadly on NATO, by persuading the Dutch not to deploy cruise missiles. Our job was to say to the Dutch, "You have a responsibility as a NATO member. You are protected under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty by America, our troops and our weapons". Unlike Norway, we had American troops stationed in the Netherlands. "They are here to defend you and part of your responsibility is to accept the NATO decision which was made years before to deploy these missiles."

In addition, the Dutch were on a sensitive NATO group called the NPG, the Nuclear Planning Group, a small group of NATO members who dealt with the most sensitive issues dealing with nuclear weapons. Our private message to the Dutch was "You can't very well expect to stay in the Nuclear Planning Group if you are not willing to meet your responsibilities." So it was a very difficult issue and we had to play a quiet but firm game of hardball with them.

Q: You arrived at the embassy. Who was your DCM? I would have thought you would have had some problems in that the Netherlands sounding like a good place to put good old Joe or good old Mary. I have been in personnel. We did this. It was such a vital issue and such a complicated government, the two don't quite square off.

BREMER: I was lucky. I told my predecessor's deputy that I was going to bring my own deputy. In those days in the Foreign Service, the ambassador effectively could choose his deputy chief of mission -- that was about all you could do by way of choosing your staff. I asked a good friend of mine, Art Hughes, who had worked with me in the secretariat years before. Art had been a special assistant to the under secretary for management when I was special assistant to the secretary of state. In 1983, he was serving as deputy

chief of mission in Copenhagen in a very difficult situation. He had a difficult ambassador.

I called Art in Copenhagen and asked him if he would be willing to come down and be my deputy. He was delighted to be free of what was a very difficult situation in Copenhagen. He had the right experience in Europe; he'd been in a NATO country. He was what I needed as a deputy which was the exact opposite of me. He was a real inside guy, he really knew how to operate with people, and he was very, very good. And he never hesitated to tell me when I was wrong.

I inherited a strong political section and a strong economic section. I was lucky. I wound up with an extremely strong embassy, largely through luck, except for my choice of DCM.

Q: Let's stick to the cruise missile thing. What was, we are talking about the '80s and this is long past the time when the Soviets pushed the peace button as in Helsinki and in other places, there were tremendous demonstrations. What was causing this?

BREMER: As the files have become more available with the fall of the Soviet Union, it has become clearer that the Soviets were funding many of these peace movements in Europe, particularly in Germany. The ostensible organizers of first this major demonstration -- and we had them all the time -- were the peace movements in the Netherlands, and Germany but also in some of the other countries as well. The Soviets, I think from their point of view, clearly saw an opportunity to try to break, to fracture NATO over this issue, particularly the Dutch.

Again the strategic context here is under President Carter NATO had agreed to the 1978 Two Track decision about the cruise missiles. Carter had started a defense buildup in the late 70s; Reagan had continued it. Reagan by then had announced the Strategic Defense Initiative which I think concerned the Soviets greatly, as documents have shown since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Q: This was the so-called 'Star Wars', anti-missile defense.

BREMER: Anti-ballistic missile defense. At that time the Soviet leader was Andropov. Eventually Gorbachev seems to have understood how weak their economy was. They may have had a better understanding than we did. We don't seem to have understood it until it fell apart.

Q: This is one of these things one wonders about our intelligence.

BREMER: I think a lot of the people who were against the cruise missiles were legitimately and sincerely opposed for whatever reasons. I think they were wrong but I don't question their motives. I met frequently with the leaders of the Dutch peace movement. They were decent, well meaning men and women. Just wrong about the Soviets.

Q: Were these the same people who had made life hell for our people in our consulate in Amsterdam?

BREMER: Sometimes the peace movement held demonstrations in Amsterdam. But the most active demonstrations there, the ones that occasionally attacked our consulate, concerned Central America. This issue boiled along the entire time we were in the Netherlands. The Sandinistas had taken over in Nicaragua in 1979. In the 80s America was supporting the government of El Salvador in their efforts to stop the Sandinistas in their efforts to overthrow the government in El Salvador. This became a very big issue on campuses and universities of the Netherlands, for reasons that aren't entirely clear. My predecessor said one memorable thing about why the Dutch could get so exercised about Central America: "Afghanistan is too far away. Poland is too near. Nicaragua is just right." I thought that was a very good way of describing the Dutch attitude.

We had demonstrations and sometimes attacks on our consulate in Amsterdam and demonstrations at the Embassy in The Hague every Friday. These were our weekly pro-Sandinista and anti-American demonstrations. There was probably some overlap between those people and the people in the peace movement; but it was another issue. Sometimes the demonstrators would come over the wall in Amsterdam, the police would fire tear gas and a number would be arrested and then let go. We finally had to put bigger fences up in Amsterdam. The demonstrations in Hague rarely got violent, but they were very regular.

Q: I assume these were mostly students or were they sort of the people hanging around the drug scene?

BREMER: In Amsterdam you could never really tell the difference. I think most of the people who were into serious drugs probably couldn't have gotten themselves anyplace on time, and unlikely get over our walls. I think it was mostly students.

I went to the Free University in Amsterdam where I had been invited to give a lecture of some kind to a class. I was protected by Dutch security, and my security guards found people sitting in the hall outside and refusing to let us past into the hall. Matters became rather heated and the students started shouting anti-Americanisms through a loud speaker. When one of hem took a breath, I asked to borrow the loudspeaker myself and I said to this group of students, "This is a country that has prided itself on its open and liberal approach to ideas and trade for 400 years. It's rather discouraging that you won't let me come and present my case to you." I added that I was disappointed to read that the Free University had just decided to become a partner with the University of Managua, which was at that time run by communists and which could by no reason be assumed to share these historic Dutch values.

This little speech did not have a calming effect on the students. My security detail was increasingly uncomfortable with the rising tension, so they said we had to leave. We ended up leaving under a hail of stones thrown at the car. This was the kind of thing that

was going on. But this dispute over Central America was a sideshow; the real question was the cruise missiles.

Q: You've got this thing. How did you find your line of attack?

BREMER: One thing I quickly learned as I talked to the Dutch, both before I went and after I got there, was that the Dutch have an expression, they say "we Dutch have very long toes." It's very easy to step on their toes. Despite the fact that the average Dutchman or woman won't hesitate to tell you what's wrong with America or Europe, they do not take well to being lectured themselves. The advice I got was to be careful about what you say publicly about cruise missiles. In the three years I was in The Netherlands, I never once publicly said, "The Dutch should deploy the cruise missiles." My predecessor said it all the time and it appeared to have been counterproductive.

I planned our campaign with my political team. It was to work quietly behind the scenes, particularly on the soft part of the Christian Democratic Party. The Labor Party, the PVDA, which was in opposition, was dead set against the cruise missiles as labor parties were in most of Europe. So there was not much chance we were going to turn the PVDA in favor. Therefore the question was going to depend on this soft part of the Christian Democrats. The liberals were with us and the strong part of the Christian Democrats, represented by the foreign minister. The key question was going to come down to the minister of defense and people in his part of the Christian Democratic Party.

We approached them in a number of ways; I used one on one private meetings, usually lunch at the residence, no note takers on either side, just one on one. I usually kept it light, just talk through Dutch history, Dutch American relations, our NATO alliance, etc. There were lots of buttons you could push. America and the Netherlands have the oldest unbroken diplomatic relations between two countries in the world. We had liberated the Dutch in September of 1944. There is a huge cemetery with almost 9,000 Americans, one of these beautiful battle monuments at a place called Margraten in the south. There is a residual sense in the Dutch about the importance of the American relationship quite apart from the NATO part.

The principal argument to these people, including the minister of defense, was to try to make a case that Dutch security was threatened by the Russian deployment of the Russian SS-20 missiles; that NATO had to respond to protect their people including the Dutch, and that it was a responsibility of a NATO member, including the Netherlands, to carry out the decision that had been made by NATO back in 1978 to deploy these missiles. Moreover in 1983, the Netherlands was the only country of the five deploying countries that hadn't made the decision. So an effort to embarrass them on not playing a full alliance role.

Q: The other countries being Italy, Germany and?

BREMER: The UK and Belgium. We recognized this was an extremely difficult decision for the Dutch. Dutch public opinion polls showed strong opposition to deployment. But

we reminded the Dutch that the opinion polls had been very strongly against the decision in Germany until Helmut Schmidt took the decision and then he won an election. So one of the arguments we made to the Dutch politicians was, "we understand the political difficulties you face, but you have to show leadership. Yes, the opinion polls area against it but leadership involves making taking tough decisions and explaining them to your people."

Q: Wasn't the SS-20 menace, I mean it was so obvious what this was.

BREMER: It wasn't so obvious to people who didn't want to deploy them. Or it was obvious and they discounted it. One of the things we did, as did our embassies in other deploying countries in Europe, was to arrange for highly sensitive briefings of the leaders by people from our intelligence services.

Some members of the peace movement actually argued that we had made the whole thing up, that there were no SS-20s. The second argument was we were exaggerating the numbers of missiles. A way to take away that argument was to have a team of photo interpreters with their photographs and the other intelligence come and share it with selected Dutch government members and members of parliament. This strengthened the hand of those like the foreign minister who wanted to deploy these missiles.

Q: Was the Soviet hand apparent, was it heavy or light?

BREMER: No, it wasn't heavy, except that shortly after I got there, the Russians changed their ambassador and sent a guy who was almost out of central casting, I don't remember his name but he was one of these guys with a pork pie hat. He spoke only Russian, maybe some Polish. He really had no way of moving around and being effective with the Dutch So he turned out to be, to us, a blessing because he was so crude and so oblivious in what he was trying to do.

In The Hague, as in most posts, when you are a new ambassador you call on the other ambassadors who preceded you in presenting credentials. The tradition in The Hague was this was done by couples. So as a new Ambassador you and your spouse would go to the other ambassador's residence. When Francie and I went to call on the Italian ambassador we went to his residence for tea. Most of the ambassadors there were effectively in a retirement post. They had been rewarded. The Italian was an older man who had a droopy eye and as we sat drinking tea at 4:30 in the afternoon, he literally started falling asleep as he was talking. I was tired. I started to fall asleep until a spoon dropped off his teacup on the hard wooden floor and woke all four of us up. Francie said after that, "That's the last time I am going to one of these things. It is a waste of time for me. From now on, you go on your own or see them at the office." I said, "Fine."

So the new Russian Ambassador had to call on me and I said, "Come to the embassy. I am not doing it at my house." He came with his interpreter and I had our political counselor as note taker. The Russian started with one of these traditional diplomatic niceties along the lines of "we hope while we are together in The Hague our relations that

were so historically so good between our two countries could develop further". I stopped him and said, "Mr. Ambassador, let me tell you something. My first assignment was in Afghanistan, 15 years ago and you guys have now invaded Afghanistan." This was 1983, so they had already been mucking about for four years. They were already beginning to run into trouble. I said, "Let me tell you something. I don't know who made the decision in the Kremlin to invade Afghanistan but they obviously hadn't studied Afghan history because if you had studied Afghan history, you would know it is the only country which in the 19th century twice beat the British army and held back the forces of people trying to come in from outside. Our relations, U.S.-Russian relations, will not improve until you get out of Afghanistan." Well, that was the end of that short "courtesy call." He left after ten minutes and I never had another meeting with him.

He turned out to be, at least in terms of what he did overtly, pretty ineffective. I don't know what he may have been doing behind the scenes.

Q: How about our USIA operation there because this should have been quite important at that point.

BREMER: We had a good PAO, a part of the team I inherited, a very active cultural attaché, and a good IO as well.

Q: Information officer.

BREMER: Yes, he was very good with the press. It was important. We did a lot with them both in terms of exposing the Dutch to NATO through NATO tours, using the important visitor program. I had a substantial battle over the Fulbright program, not with my staff but with the Fulbright board. In fact, I had need to fire the entire board and start over because it had drifted off course.

Q: Had it drifted toward the reward as opposed to the opinion?

BREMER: I described earlier how I had been uneasy with how the IV and Fulbright programs had been run in Norway. When I got to The Hague, I asked to see list of the last three years of Fulbrighters -- their background. I found that the board members who were largely from Dutch universities were rewarding colleagues. I have nothing against 50-year-old men, but these were 50 or 60 year old economists going on Fulbrights. I took a look at the law that established it and at our guidance from USIA and it was clear we were off base. The program in the Netherlands is governed by a bilateral commission in which the American ambassador and the Dutch minister of education are the ex officio chairmen of the board. I went to the minister of education, Wim Deetman, who was a very able guy and said, "Wim, here's the situation with Fulbright. We have a real fight on our hands because we are going to have to change the whole board to make the program more effective. I can't do it without knowing you are going to support me because all these universities", there are 22 universities in the country, "are going to start squealing like hell." He said, "Let's do it". So we fired the board and appointed a new board. He

and I met them and gave them clear directions to look for younger people who would help develop the Netherlands.

It was much the same problem with the IV program which I already mentioned addressing in Norway. I found the same problem in the Netherlands. This program had been used, in this case, by embassy staff to reward their friends and friends of their friends. But that's not how I saw the purpose and value of the IV program, which was to identify young leaders and send them off to the United States to do whatever they wanted to do on the assumption that America sells itself. So we turned the IV program around, too.

On the whole, the USIA staff was good. The Dutch take culture very seriously. One of the concerns I had was we seemed to be spending American taxpayer funds on cultural events which didn't strike me as a good use of our money because American artists, musicians, writers go to the Netherlands all the time on regular commercial ventures. I didn't think that was a very good use of American money, nor did I think having a reading library was a good use of our money. First of all, the Dutch have the highest English language capability of any country in the world, except perhaps Israel. They all read. There are more books published in English in the Netherlands than in Dutch. They all read books; they have read books for 400 years. Why should the American taxpayer support a library with people coming off the street, with all the attendant difficulties and costs of security?

I felt that we had a little bit of an "old USIA look" in terms of promoting culture in a country, where after all, they knew American culture. We weren't going to be able to compete with American television and American movies which regrettably are a part of American culture. We weren't going to be able to bring artists except on a very exceptional basis because they came as a matter of course anyway. So we had to reorient.

Our general public posture was complicated by the fact that I concluded that I would not say anything publicly about cruise missiles. I could give speeches and I did all the time But in those I talked in general terms about our long bilateral relations, about the alliance and various political things but I would not say in public "You must deploy the cruise missiles."

Q: What happens if you have an eminent journalist who is talking to you? He or she obviously is going to ask about the cruise missiles.

BREMER: I would say that this is a Dutch decision to make and we understand it is a very sensitive one for them. They gave up asking at a certain point.

We had visitors come through, government officials, the vice president visited. He stayed three days and had a variety of meetings with people.

Q: George Bush?

BREMER: Yes. I don't think that he said anything about the missiles publicly. The most interesting statement that was made publicly was made by the French president who was a socialist, Francois Mitterrand. He came on an official visit to the Netherlands I think in 1985 and spoke to the Dutch parliament. He bluntly told them they should deploy the cruise missiles. It was really quite a moment. To have a French president, a leftist, tell them they had to take the cruise missiles. Rather embarrassing for the Dutch Labor Party which stood foursquare against deployment. And brave of Mitterrand.

Q: How did your political section work?

BREMER: The head of the political section, Mike Habib, was married to a German and had served already a number of years both in Germany and in Austria. He had good Dutch. So did his wife. There were two or three other people in the embassy who had good Dutch. I studied Dutch every morning and got to a point I could get along in Dutch pretty well. Mike was an excellent political officer. He was the kind of guy who got around, talked to people, understood what questions to ask, used his entertainment money well to get at people who were in that gray area we were trying to influence. It is not that we ignored the people who were our supporters or the Labor Party; we had regular discussions with the Labor Party too. But we knew in the end the Labor Party was not going to vote in favor of the cruise missiles when it came before parliament. Though I should add that there were some Labor party members who privately told us they supported deployment. But it would have been political suicide to admit it publicly.

Q: During the time there, how did things develop, vis- a- vis, the cruise missiles?

BREMER: It was a very long and in effect, difficult negotiation that took the better part of three years. We had ups and downs, largely related to the internal debates within the Christian Democratic Party. We found that it was important to try to help strengthen Hans van den Broek, the foreign minister who was in favor of the deployment. In the fall and winter of '85-'86 we started having secret meetings with him in Brussels. I believe it was the assistant secretary for Europe, Rick Burt, who came up with the idea of having conversations with him away from The Hague where van den Broek would be a little bit less constrained by what was going on and could perhaps speak more openly abut how to resolve their political problem.

We arranged a series of meetings through van den Broek's special assistant, a fellow named Jaap de Hoop Scheffer who happens today to be NATO secretary general. At that time, his uncle, also called Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, was the Dutch ambassador to NATO. So the meetings took place at the Dutch ambassador's residence in Brussels. Van den Broek and I would proceed down to Brussels separately and have a meeting, usually before or after dinner at the Dutch ambassador's house, and then drive back to The Hague. The purpose was to try to get some sense from van den Broek about how he saw the internal situation within the party and how we could help get the right decision out of the government. These meetings took place, I think there were five or six of them, in the winter of late '85 and winter of '86.

Q: In a way, you say the process but basically was it a yes or no or three missiles here and two there?

BREMER: It was going to be a yes or no. What we tried to do in the broadest sense was to remind the Dutch of the importance of the Dutch-American relationship and not talk about the cruise missiles publicly and then have the discussion of cruise missiles take place within a broader context. So for example, I traveled all over the country. I visited all 15 provinces and called on the governors. Every time I went to a provincial capital, USIA would line up meetings with the press. We would meet with the American business community, the Dutch business community, and go do the tourism and get lots of press attention to that. All of that would be in the broader context of U.S.-Dutch relations. We always looked for opportunities to remind the Dutch of the depth of these relations.

Every year, for example, on Memorial Day, there is a large celebration commemorating the liberation of the Netherlands at cemetery I mentioned, in Margraten, in the south. Almost 9,000 Americans killed in World War two are buried there. Very often the Dutch prime minister or one of the top cabinet ministers and the American ambassador would go. It was an occasion again to invoke the long U.S.-Dutch relationship going back to the loan they made to John Adams that got us through the Revolution, the first recognition, and the longest relationship. In other words, it was important to stress, as I did in my speeches, the importance of our economic relations, each other's largest investor, talking to businessmen to put the kernel of the immediate issue, the cruise missiles, into a broader context. That was a large part of our public strategy and USIA played an important role in that.

Q: Was anybody looking at the whole cruise missile versus the SS-20 and seeing this at the time and saying, "Well, one will eventually cancel out the other and the Soviet Union is getting weaker." Was this ever part of it?

BREMER: No. Again, I was in the Netherlands until late '86 and I don't know whether there were people at that time beginning to get the sense that the Soviet Union was weaker than we thought at the time. I just don't know. It was not clear to me in the Netherlands, anyway.

Q: Were there any strong voices in the Netherlands, natives there of supporting us? Or was this the sort of thing nobody wanted to get too involved in?

BREMER: There were very few people who wanted to get involved in it. There were some leaders of the Dutch Liberal Party, the VVD as it is called, who publicly made the fundamental points we were making. The SS-20s posed a threat to Dutch security;; the Dutch had a national reason to want to respond and they had an international obligation to respond as members of NATO. There were a few people in the Dutch think-tank world who felt that way and said so. But there were not a lot of people who were going to get out and say so publicly. Most of the public discussion was from the opponents to the cruise missiles. There was one newspaper, the De Telegraaf, the largest circulating a broadsheet, that favored the deployment of cruise missiles. But the Volkskrant which was

the Labor Party's paper, was adamantly against it. Algemeen Dagblad which was in the middle only at very end came out in favor. The NRC Handelsblad which was the most respected, rather like the Financial Times, took an ambivalent position. The national television, of course, was basically opposed. So it was a hostile media environment.

Q: I would see reports here about the Dutch contribution to NATO and it wasn't sort of weekend warriors; in fact, just the reverse, that the navy would come in on a weekend and everything would shut down. It came back that it didn't seem to be a very effective force. Was there diminution in support of NATO?

BREMER: The Dutch are basically a naval power. They had been at sea for 500 years; they were pretty good in their golden age, the *Gouden Eeuw*, before the British took them on. The Dutch military, in particular the navy but also the army were an important part of the equation and supported the deployment quietly. But of course, they could not take a political position and they were rigorously non-political.

As for their effectiveness, about two weeks after I arrived there was the annual large scale NATO exercise, with many Americans involved, which in those days took place every September in the south of the Netherlands -- a couple of divisions moving around with the Dutch in a big exercise. I told my defense attaché I wanted to attend it. As usual it was pouring rain. I needed something to wear to the exercise and so they got me a Dutch private's outfit. I remember SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) was there and we were watching a pontoon bridge be thrown across a raging stream for troops to move across. Somebody brought him over and introduced me to him as the American ambassador and he looked at me in this Dutch private's outfit and he said, "What?"

He and I then got to talking about the capability of the Dutch troops. If you looked at them -- they all had ponytails and rings in their ears -- and you think, is this serious? He said, "I will tell you something. These are among the best troops in NATO because they are very well educated." It was a conscript army so everyone had to go in, "They are very professional. They get in a foxhole or take their position and they know exactly what their area of responsibility is. They know how they are going to defend it. They have good ideas, they take the initiative. They are wonderful troops." So looks can be deceiving.

Q: I heard later during the Balkan crisis that the Dutch air force, particularly the women fighter pilots were superb.

BREMER: Another example of the Dutch culture came to me from the American business community's experience. Something like 1,100 American companies that had their European headquarters in the Netherlands; that's a lot, more than in any other country at that time. It is partly explained by the country's central location and good transportation, but also liberal economic policies, light and open regulations and a light tax regime. But beyond that it was productivity. I remember visiting on one of my provincial trips a Xerox factory down in the south near Margraten, south of Maastricht. We went through this factory where they were assembling Xerox machines. The director

of the factory, a Dutchman, told me he was very proud because their factory had the lowest unit cost of any Xerox manufacturing plant in the world. This is in a country where at that time the average Dutch wage was already above the average wage in America, and on top of that you had the social cost -- the burdens, the taxes and so on.

We estimated the average wage really worked out to almost 50% more than the average American wage but their productivity was better than anybody. I said, "How can that be?" He said, "Because they are extremely well educated and they are forthcoming with ideas. So down on the factory floor somebody says, well, why do we move to our right to get that gizmo when we could have had it done the other way?" And that's a classic way to lift productivity.

It was in many ways typical of the Dutch; very highly educated, very outspoken. They were never afraid to tell you if they thought you were wrong; or if they thought the machine was put the wrong way -- they would tell you. A lot of that also came through in their fighting forces, that same "we know how to get this job done well -- we could maybe even do it a little better."

Q: Was the cruise missile situation resolved by the time you left or was it still ticking?

BREMER: No, it was resolved. In the spring of 1986 we finally got to a point where the prime minister, who had been reluctant most of the time to do it, believed that he had the votes in parliament to get the formal parliamentary approval for the cruise missiles. So he put it to the parliament. There was a very long, almost all night session of parliament. I decided it would not be appropriate for me to show up in parliament for such a politically sensitive vote. The Prime Minister had to be able to make his case without obvious American pressure. I sent the Mike Habib, the political counselor and asked him to call me. We had a pre-positioned telegram ready to go at the embassy. The debate went on until 2:30 or 3 in the morning and they passed it, and we sent a message back to Washington.

Q: Were you there when this mass demonstration or was that before you got there? How did you handle it?

BREMER: As mentioned, the big demonstration, the largest in European history up to that point, took place a month after I arrived in 1983. My security detail said they didn't want me at the embassy that day because they didn't know if it might turn violent. So I stayed at the residence. We had staff at the embassy that day. So it was pretty gentrified. We reduced the Embassy profile in order that we not have a lot of people coming and going. I stayed regular telephone contact with the DCM, Art Hughes, who was at the embassy. We just watched it go by. But Francie left the residence on a bicycle and rode down to check out the demonstration. She came back and said the crowd was full of families, with women pushing baby carriages. There was no violence.

Q: What do demonstrations do for foreign policy? We are always having these things and everybody participates. Any effect or not?

BREMER: I think this one probably encouraged the opponents of NATO because it wasn't just against the cruise missiles and particularly in the Netherlands. It was a very big show of force. It was well organized, well disciplined and had had the effect of emboldening the peace movement in the Netherlands which got a lot of bump out of it; they helped organize it. Obviously, the demonstration got a huge amount of press, not only in the Netherlands but throughout Europe. This demonstration was unlike the weekly violent demonstrations about Nicaragua, which I don't think had much effect at all. But I think these big peace demonstrations helped to shape the political environment. We were, after all, trying to do the same thing. We were trying to shape the political environment through our constant emphasis on U.S.-Dutch relations, the Dutch responsibilities to NATO, NATO's commitment to the Netherlands.

At one point Art Hughes and I were talking to a Dutch politician over one of these small luncheons at our house and the guest expressed some doubt that the United States would really come to the defense of Europe. That was always another problem; would we really in fact defend Europe? "How can we be sure," he asked, "that Americans were willing to defend Europe?" Art replied "Go visit the air force base at Soesterberg", where we had F-15 squadron, "you will see over a billion dollars and 3,000 American lives which are a clear marker of our intention to defend the Netherlands." It was a very good remark that shut the guy up fast. There was always the question, even among the people who wanted to deploy cruise missiles, about whether we would be willing to use them. So you had a separate side of the argument you had to make. We are prepared to defend the Netherlands but you Dutch have got to be prepared to carry your responsibilities.

Q: By this point was there much sympathy for the Soviets, you know, seeing the future?

BREMER: No, not much. There was a little bit on the far left. But it was more that there was a fair amount of anti-Americanism. President Reagan was much derided in the European press as an uneducated cowboy. I was there during the 1984 election -- Reagan versus Mondale. The pollsters were very active in the Netherlands and the polls before the election showed that if the Dutch had been asked to vote, they would have voted 92% for Mondale and 6% for Reagan and 2% undecided. Some of that was anti-American, most of it anti-Reagan. But I don't think it would be right to assume that there was much attraction, except on the far left, for the Soviets. The Dutch have been free for a very long time -- for centuries. They had been under German occupation and so had an active memory of how intolerable it was to live under an authoritarian government. Like the Norwegians, they had made the mistake in the First World War, assuming that neutrality would protect them; and like the Norwegians had found in the Second World War, neutrality wasn't enough. So, like the Norwegians, they joined NATO after the Second World War. Part of the argument was just a sense that the alliance and particularly America was overreacting to the Russian SS-20 deployments. Some of them thought that the SS-20s didn't exist; some of them thought there were fewer than there were; some of them thought they weren't really a threat; some of them thought that they were a threat but that America, in fact, would not defend NATO or the Netherlands when the chips

were down. So there was a panoply of arguments. I don't think the Soviets had much attraction.

Q: Were there pretty good reports coming back about the Soviet Union and life there?

BREMER: No. It was not a factor.

Q: How about life in the United States, racial problems? You mentioned Reagan was unpopular. Particularly this was the first term of Reagan, sort of feeling his way. Later I assume it probably changed somewhat because well, the situation changed.

Were there news documentaries of poverty in the United States and the racial situation?

BREMER: Yes, there was a lot of that, particularly on television. We export a lot of negative culture ourselves from television and movies and there is nothing we can do about that. We tried in ways we could, using the IV program, Fulbright and other things to try to expose people to the better sides of the United States. I have always argued, I did in Norway, that the United States sells itself. Let the IV visitors go for three weeks, let them decide what they want to see and let them go see whatever they want.

Q: Was this sort of the designated place where the Dutch students would go for master's degrees or not?

BREMER: Not as much as we would have hoped because the Dutch system did not recognize American advanced degrees. So if you had a law degree from the United States, you couldn't practice law in the Netherlands without then getting a Dutch law degree; same with other professions. Because there is a large Dutch American community, a lot of Dutch people visited the United States. There were quite a few students going both directions. We tried to do more but here wasn't as much as you would hope.

Q: On the economic side, his main problem was KLM landing rights. Did that come up or not?

BREMER: No, these were days before we got to the open skies discussions.

On general economic matters, the Dutch were the easiest place to do that kind of business with. For example, by the time I got there we had had for decades American Department of Agriculture people doing inspections of plants under American law, in Dutch territory, for the export of flowers. They were pre-inspected in the Netherlands, which in effect was an assertion of American law inside the Netherlands, to enable them to export their flowers to the United States which they did and still do. During our time in the Hague, the Netherlands was either the first or second country –the British might have been first, to agree agreed as terrorism picked up to have pre inspection by American customs and immigration people for people taking flights from the Netherlands to the United States on American carriers. I think at that time we had TWA, I don't remember whether there

were others. The travelers went through American immigration in a foreign country. You had American immigration officers in American uniforms basically clearing people's passports and visas before they got onto American carriers.

There were some difficult issues. The Dutch had a much more liberal attitude towards drugs and pornography than the United States did or does and those were difficult issues which often became very contentious with the Dutch government.

But on the trade issues, the Dutch were very open.

Q: Let's talk about drugs. You had Amsterdam; did you find, was the care and feeding of Americans there, protection or getting out of trouble over Americans?

BREMER: Yes, the consulate in Amsterdam had its hands full. Part of the problem was that very few people ever got put in jail for using drugs. The drug laws were lax and at least in terms of hashish and marijuana essentially not enforced.

While I was there it became obvious that the Dutch were beginning to have a hard drug problem, most of it heroin coming out of Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle in Burma. The trade took advantage of the fact the Dutch airport, Schiphol, was one of the major transit points for that traffic and the Dutch began to arrest people there. The Dutch did not take kindly to hard drugs; they were certainly very soft on marijuana and hashish. One of our constant points of friction was the argument by American officials that if you were soft on soft drugs, eventually the soft drugs were a path for people to use hard drugs. The science on this is ambivalent but, in any case, that was our argument. Certainly the Dutch did not like the fact of hard drugs.

As you would expect, from time to time Americans ran into trouble with drugs, and high on either drugs or alcohol, some wound up breaking up bars. We had a Marine break up a bar once in the night somewhere and I had him shipped out the next day.

Q: What about relations between the Dutch and the Germans at that time? Did we play, I mean here are two of our allies and they obviously they weren't on the greatest of terms.

BREMER: The Dutch had an even more vivid memory of German occupation than I had found among the Norwegians even though our stay in the Netherlands was ten years further from the war and the occupation.

Q: As you mentioned in Norway, I won't say benevolent; it never is but I mean it wasn't of the same nature.

BREMER: Except for a few Norwegian cities in April of 1940 and in Narvik a bit later, there wasn't much military action involved in the occupation of Norway. On the other hand, the Germans basically destroyed Rotterdam and overran the whole country in the Netherlands and then they sat very hard on the Dutch people.

The German government had an extraordinarily able ambassador, Otto von der Gablentz, -- a career German diplomat who came about the same time I did. He was a little bit older than I was but still fairly young, learned and spoke very good Dutch, had a warm and outgoing personality, handled himself very well. He did not carry a high profile, which I think was appropriate, but he got around and talked to lots of people. Otto was from the Social Democratic Party, so he had some appeal to the left in the Netherlands. He supported the deployment of Cruise missiles, as his government did. His was a very good face for Germany and he handled his post very well.

South of the Rhine in the Netherlands is the area where the largest battles of liberation took place. The liberation of the south started in early September of 1944 and then Operation Market Garden which in the end failed, A Bridge Too Far, which took place a few weeks later with the allies fighting all the way up to Nijmegen. This area of the Netherlands was really fought over pretty hard. It was the only area of the Netherlands where I remember being welcomed as the American ambassador with crowds waving flags. It is the most Catholic part of the Netherlands. So it is a more conservative area.

Q: Were the Dutch when you would meet them talking about too many German tourists? Was this sort of a theme that ran along?

BREMER: No, not so much. There were still sensitivities about the Germans, certainly.

Q: How about in Belgium? You had the Walloons which I am told is basically Flemish. Did that overlap? Was that strictly confined to Belgium or did the Dutch play any role?

BREMER: No, they didn't play any role. It's really more of a dialect. The Dutch spoken in the Netherlands is slightly different than the Dutch or the Flemish spoken in Belgium and there are regional accents inside the Netherlands as well. By the way, Frisian is still spoken in the northern islands a little bit.

Overall the Belgians did not involve themselves much in Dutch matters. The only connection was the tax regime. The personal income tax regime was such that if you lived in Belgium and commuted to the Netherlands, you ended up paying less tax. So some businessmen who worked in the Netherlands south of the Rhine tended to live in Belgium and then come across the border to their work place.

Q: Did the French play much of a role?

BREMER: No, although as I mentioned, Mitterrand gave an extremely important speech on the cruise missiles when he came on a visit. The French and American embassies were side by side. And I saw the French ambassador often. I established a tradition of the French, German, British and American ambassadors having lunch once a month to discuss the cruise missiles to try to find out what each of us knew about what was going on. The French, although they were not in the NATO military part of NATO and although they were obviously not a deploying country, nonetheless, supported the deployment of the missiles.

Q: Why?

BREMER: I think Mitterrand understood the threat of the Soviet Union. Despite having had communist sympathies when he was young -- or perhaps because of that -- Mitterrand was a real Gaullist; he took a very hardheaded view of Europe and didn't want the Soviet Union to gain strength.

Q: Did you find yourself engaged in a lot of discussion trying to deal with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and El Salvador?

BREMER: To me it was largely a distraction. As I said, I agreed with Bill Dyess; Afghanistan is too far away, Poland is too close, Nicaragua is just right. If you are a left wing Dutchman, that just covers everything.

We did have the regular demonstrations but I didn't spend a lot of time on it. We had speakers come from time to time and they would go around and talk about it with no evidence success.

Q: How did you find the socialists? Were these sort of really committed to socialism or was this just a left wing party?

BREMER: I would think it was more of a left wing party. The Netherlands then had and had had for a long time a pretty active private sector. There really were very few companies in the Netherlands owned by the government. So it was not socialist in the classic French sense of the word where you nationalize big sectors of the economy.

I have a vivid impression of the first luncheon I went to after I got to the Netherlands. Maybe ten days after I presented my credentials, I was invited to a lunch by an important Dutch business organization in Amsterdam. I was surprised to find the prime minister and three cabinet members at this lunch. It said to me, "these people take business seriously." It was a lunch for businessmen; it wasn't about politics. It was about "how we promote business?" I guess I was invited because the organizers figured, correctly, that US-Dutch commercial relations were important to both countries. The government ministers were not from the Labor Party, but it showed a certain business orientation that goes through Dutch society. The Labor Party was not about to go out and do something rash. As in Norway, the Dutch had a responsible labor movement, not like the radicalized movement in France.

Q: What was the role of the royal family?

BREMER: The royal family has enormous respect in the country. They have had now three successive queens for a period of over a hundred years. The present queen's mother, Wilhelmina, fled the country at the German invasion and lived in exile in England. She sent most of her family to Canada during the war and just as King Haakon had done for the Norwegians, the Queen rallied the Netherlands to the resistance to the Germans. She

returned as a genuine heroine at the end of the war. Her daughter, Beatrix, the current queen, was educated at the Free University. She graduated in 1964 and married a German diplomat, Klaus von Amsberg, who had a successful diplomatic career, had served in Africa. Once he married her, he became like a Japanese emperor's wife. He had to give up his diplomatic career and almost literally follow three steps behind her, which I suspect became a considerable psychological strain for him as the years went by.

Beatrix succeeded to the throne some years before I became ambassador. In the Dutch tradition, the queen's authority is limited on paper but more real behind the scenes. All conversations with the queen are considered privileged and, therefore, conversations are not to be talked about in public.

She had graduated at a time of considerable leftist agitation in Dutch universities in the '60s. Her general political inclination was clearly to the left though naturally she didn't speak publicly about political matters like cruise missiles. I never talked to her about cruise missiles. I would often talk to her about the importance of the U.S. relationship and the alliance. But from what I heard from other people ho knew her well, the Queen was, at a minimum, skeptical about the cruise missile issue which gave an additional dimension to our problem.

It became very clear when we had a visit one day from Jesse Jackson.

Q: He's a well-known African American politician.

BREMER: Jackson at the time held no elected office but was clearly and outspokenly against the cruise missile plan. He was on a trip through Europe to major NATO countries. He had been in London the day before he was to visit the Netherlands. That morning International Herald Tribune had a picture of him on its front page standing with the American ambassador to Britain and denouncing the entire proposal to deploy cruise missiles, denouncing Reagan's administration. I could not imagine that the American Ambassador was pleased, and I certainly did not look forward to the same treatment.

I was scheduled to meet Jackson at the airport when he flew into the Netherlands later that morning. I said to our public affairs officer that I was not going to allow myself to have my picture taken and put on the front page, splashed on the front pages of Dutch papers, with Jackson who was denouncing cruise missiles and denouncing the administration. So we had to figure a way to not have the press around when I met with him. We arranged for the VIP room at the airport. I happened to have another meeting that morning in Amsterdam which was the reason we gave for my not going out and greeting him at the gate.

So Jackson came into the VIP room. We had no cameras and no press. I briefed him on the sensitivity of the cruise missile issue, because he was going to call on the queen. I reminded him that all the conversations with the queen were. I encouraged him to say whatever h wanted to in the meeting, but to remember by long-standing Dutch protocol, all conversations with Her Majesty are off the record. Oh, yes, he understood that. So he

and his party went off. No one from the Embassy accompanied him on any of his meetings and by late afternoon he had already left the country for a visit to Germany. In late afternoon a wire service ran a story based on a statement he had released to the press after his meeting with the queen -- and after he left the Netherlands -- saying in his meeting with the queen she had expressed her opposition to the deployment of cruise missiles.

You can imagine what hit the fan. The Chamberlain of the royal court called me saying, "This is outrageous, don't you Americans understand that conversations with Her Majesty are privileged?" I called on all my diplomatic experience and groveled. Our PAO got hold of Jackson's staff guy in Frankfurt and told them they had to publicly clear up the mess that they had left behind. I think in the end Jackson's spokesman -- not Jackson -- put out a wishy-washy apology, trying to cover it up by saying that he'd been misunderstood or some such political dodge.

It was painful because I suspect it was the truth; I never asked but I suspect she probably did tell Jackson she opposed deployment. Certainly it was out there on the record which was a problem because she was extremely popular.

Q: Why would he get to see her?

BREMER: I don't know. He organized the meeting through the Dutch embassy in Washington. I don't know what they told the Palace. Someone said she should see him and she probably wanted to see him. Anyway, it was not a happy circumstance. It caused lots of problems. I was very disappointed in his behavior.

Q: I don't know but I have watched pictures of Jesse Jackson. He has the longest neck I have ever seen which in any pictures seems to come up out. He obviously is somebody who likes the press and wants his picture taken.

BREMER: That's the way it happened. It was not a comfortable situation for us because it allowed people who were doubtful about the cruise missiles or opposed it to invoke the queen's name in their private discussions. I mean that while people didn't go out and talk about the Queen's alleged opposition to deployment, it clearly played a role. She was an important, influential and well informed monarch. Her usual main political role comes after an election when she gets to choose the person who tries to put together the next government. She has a lot more latitude than the Queen of England has in those circumstances. So she is a substantial figure, politically.

Q: Before we move on, is there anything else?

BREMER: There are a couple of things I think are worth mentioning.

During our time in The Netherlands, America witnessed the growth of terrorism, the bombing of the Marine barracks and the embassy in Beirut in late 1983, followed by the bombing of the Berlin disco in 1985 and a lot more attention being paid by the State

Department to security. The secretary of state sent a message to all ambassadors after the bombing of the embassy in Beirut. I hold you, the ambassador, personally responsible for the security of your employees and the Embassy. You must do everything you can.

We did an assessment of our embassy in The Hague and found that we were vulnerable to a possible truck bomb coming down a side street that could plow into the embassy. So I went to the mayor asked him to help us by either blocking that side street or giving us some protection against attack all around the perimeter. He said, "Oh, it's going to be very hard and it's going to take a long time to get the planners' permission."

I went back to the embassy and asked the post security officer to locate some of those big dumpsters, preferably unsightly and rusty and put them on all sides of the embassy. We were on a very beautiful street in The Hague, Lange Voorhout, not far from one of palaces, a very pretty part of town. Out go these 40 foot long dumpsters.

Q: You might explain what a dumpster is.

BREMER: It's a big container for garbage, 40 feet long, 8 feet tall. He found some good rusty ones so we put them out. Needless to say, the mayor called me a couple of days later and said, "What the hell is going on over there? People are complaining that it looks awful" I said, "Well, you know, you say you wouldn't protect us. I am responsible for protecting this property which is American government property. I am going to protect it."

The resulting negotiation was rather quickly over. The city council somehow cut through all their red tape and we very soon were able to install some very large bollards, large containers for flowers and planted them with flowers. It was certainly much more attractive than dumpsters.

Next to the embassy was a restaurant and as part of this effort at enhanced security, we wound up blocking a road that went right in front of the embassy but also right in front of the restaurant. The owner was understandably unhappy because he worried that his customers cars would have park across the street. He came over one day and complained. about it. I said, "Well, look at it this way. You can now say you are the safest restaurant in the Netherlands." He said, "Well, that's an idea, maybe I can get some business that way." We ended as good friends and neighbors.

As a result of the terrorist attack on the Embassy in Beirut the secretary of state appointed Rear Admiral Bobby Inman to do a study of embassy security. His commission came up with a series of recommendations about the mandatory offset for embassies. As I recall it was 100 feet in every direction. The Commission recommended that where such an offset could not be provided to an existing Embassy location, a new one should be found. Our Embassy was, as were so many in Europe then, right in the middle of the capital city.

I asked our Admin officer where in The Hague we could find a location for an embassy with 100 feet of offset on all sides. We finally got aerial photographs of the Hague. He

came up to my office one day and laid out these photographs and said, "I found the place. It's right here." He pointed and there was a big green area. He said, "There's only one problem." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "It's the queen's palace." It was typical of the problem we faced trying to carry out the Inman commission. That issue was not resolved during my time there.

We talked earlier about drugs and its effect. One of the effects of the drug trafficking was to greatly increase the non Dutch population in Dutch prisons. Even as early as 1984, '85 more than 50% of the prisoners in the Netherlands were not Dutch; they were from outside the Netherlands because they were being picked up, largely for drug trafficking, some of it from North Africa, a lot of it from the Middle East and Asia. The Netherlands is a very open country. It has been open historically to people coming from other countries. But it was clear that sooner or later they would have to address this question of open borders. There was really no effective border control between the Netherlands and Belgium and very little between the Netherlands and Germany.

The Dutch put their head in the sand about that for a long time. It eventually has become more of an issue in the Netherlands.

I remember visiting a Dutch jail at one point because I wanted to see what it was like. The Regional Security Officer, Francie and I visited the biggest one which was in Amsterdam. As we went through the gates, they disarmed my security guards who were Dutch policemen. Francie pointed out it meant I was in the most dangerous place I could be in with no security. The Dutch prisons were pretty comfortable. All the prisoners were in single rooms; each one had bathroom and a television set. I suppose these days they have internet. It was a pretty comfortable place. I was told by the guard that one prisoner had escaped a couple of weeks before on a Friday night. He'd gone home to visit his wife and then come back on Monday to report himself. There is no penalty for escaping so it didn't extend his jail term. The whole thing struck me as a little bit lenient.

Q: Were we at all looking at the immigrant population, particularly concerned with militant Islam. Was that at all a factor?

BREMER: No. We were concerned about terrorism. The British ambassador just before I got there had been assassinated by the IRA at his residence just down the street from ours. We had intelligence suggesting the Libyans were moving around and casing places including our residence at one point. Libya at that time was very actively involved in terrorism. We had a number or threats against me. One time somebody found out about a flight Francie and I were scheduled to take to Geneva, and phoned the airline that morning that there was a bomb on the flight. They didn't find a bomb but the flight had to be canceled. At one point the foreign minister called me in to tell me he had looked at the expense of my security detail, which was provided by Dutch police. He had concluded it was too expensive and proposed to provide no protection on weekends when they had to pay overtime, I said to him, "Here's the problem. I go to church, the same church at the same time and the same place every Sunday. Are you telling me that I can't go to church anymore?" We kept the security detail.

Q: Speaking of terrorism and all, how did the bombing of the café in Berlin and the bombing in Libya, how did that play there?

BREMER: It was quite dramatic because the deputy secretary, John Whitehead, was asked by the president to travel around Europe. I think the bombing was in January or February of 1986. Whitehead came in February or March and had meetings with the top Dutch, the foreign minister, the prime minister, at which he told them, in effect, "Look, we want NATO to put together some kind of sanction, some political/economic response to the Libyan attack." Like most of the Europeans, the Dutch said, "No." They were whining and looking at the floor and Whitehead, I remember very distinctly, said, "You must understand that we have just about exhausted all peaceful means of responding." He used the same phrase, "all peaceful means", I noticed, in the reporting cables from the other NATO capitals. So the European allies were on notice that unless they did something, something was going to happen and it wasn't going to be "peaceful."

The day of our bombing in Libya Ambassador Bob Oakley, who at that time was running the counterterrorism office in the State Department, was on an official visit to the Netherlands. I had a luncheon for Bob and the foreign minister, Hans van den Broek at the residence. By coincidence the Dutch were in the presidency of the European Community those six months, so van den Broek was not only foreign minister of the Netherlands, he was the top foreign policy guy in the European Community. Since the Whitehead tour around the allies, Van den Broek had been struggling to get the European Community to respond to this clear warning that Whitehead had made.

Well, that was the day we bombed Libya. While we were at lunch, the Embassy delivered a message to Oakley telling him about the bombing. He told me that the cable announced we had bombed and asked "What do we do?" and I said, "We have to tell van den Broek right away." I remember the scene in the living room at the residence. We told van den Broek. Van den Broek went pale because he felt it pulled the plank out from under the efforts he was still making with the European Community to have them do something. I reminded the foreign minister that he had been clearly warned by Whitehead not long before. I got the clear impression that Van den Broek was not comforted to be reminded.

That bombing was in April in '86 and we were coming soon to the vote on the cruise missile vote in parliament, which was scheduled for in May. So the bombing was very dicey for us because it put our lead man on the missiles, Hans van den Broek, in an extremely difficult and embarrassing position. The public reaction in the Netherlands was very strong against the bombing raid in Libya. We got through it but it was very tough. I supported the operation. I was only sorry we didn't get Qadhafi.

Q: The European Community at that time, I am told the American ambassador has to work extra hard when the presidency of the community falls to his country because all of a sudden you have an in with what is happening in the European Community. How did this work?

BREMER: Well, yes, that's true, although it was less of a dramatic change in the Netherlands for reasons I talked about earlier because the Dutch were always an open window for us into the Community's thinking. Except for the British, the Dutch the most open about what was going on, telling us what was going on and the most open to receive our ideas about how our interests could be looked after in the European Community. So yes, it was extra workload for us. But it wasn't as dramatically different as it might have been in another country. It simply emphasized what was already there which was very close working relations with the Dutch.

Q: Were we concerned at that time about the European Community becoming a rival? This has always been sort of our real policy for since the time of the end of World War II. In a way, it was the culmination but maybe was there the feeling you might get what you wished for?

BREMER: I don't remember that being an issue in the '80s. Again, one has to remember the strategic context of American foreign policy at that time was to counter and contain the Soviet Union. A united Europe was a very important part, geopolitically, of that strategy. A united Europe meant, first of all, a united NATO which is why the cruise missile was so important. It certainly was understood that a strong economic Europe, which could or could not be united, was more likely to be strong if it was united. That fit in the grand strategy of the United States. I don't remember this being a problem, certainly not by the time I left the State Department in the late '80s.

Q: How did you find the hand of Washington on what you were doing?

BREMER: It was interesting. A lot of people were already saying that the role of the American embassies has been greatly diminished by vibrant modern communication -- people talking to other officials on the telephone; the secretary of state can just pick up the phone and she talks to so and so. Yes, that's true but we were dealing with a very sensitive and important issue in the cruise missiles. So I felt that if our Embassy could be better informed than anyone in Washington and if our analysis was the best quality, then by our reporting we could shape Washington's approach to the issue. That could make our embassy in The Hague a vital arbitrator in U.S. Dutch relations on this issue. So we set out to be and I think we wound up being the best informed embassy in the Netherlands certainly and one of the best in Europe in terms of what was going on. I had a good relationship with the secretary of state because I had worked for him but I never once talked to him directly while I was there that I remember, except when I went back on consultations. We basically played it by the book. We were well enough informed that we could shape the debate in Washington though there were occasions when Washington tried to get around us. I'll give you an example.

At my first staff meetings I established as a rule that that anytime some visiting US official came and wanted to call on a minister or deputy minister they must be accompanied by either the Ambassador or the DCM. The purpose was to be sure that we at the Embassy were kept fully informed about what visitors were saying, especially if it concerned the cruise missile issue.

Maybe three weeks later the defense attaché came with a request for "country clearance" for Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. In those days any government official who came had to get the approval of the embassy before they came on official business. I knew from my Washington time Perle was locked in a battle with Assistant Secretary Burt at the State Department over a lot of issues and, in particular, on how to approach the Europeans on the cruise missile issue. So Perle wanted to come, without a State Department official, to talk to the Dutch Defense Minister.

Q: Burt represented the extreme right wing.

BREMER: Perle did, not Burt. My analysis was the Perle would likely follow the path of my predecessor which was to bash the Dutch until they agreed to take the cruise missile. Anyway, he was asking for country clearance to come have a meeting with the defense minister, who, as we have discussed already, was the most sensitive member of the cabinet. The minister was on the left wing of the Christian Democratic Party that we needed to bring on board; he was a nice man with soft views. But he was really the key. I told the defense attaché, "You can send back a message saying he has clearance but the Assistant Secretary must understand I or my deputy will accompany him on his meeting with the defense minister."

About the next day, I got a call from the acting secretary of state who told me that Secretary of Defense Weinberger had just called, raised hell and told him that I had refused to let Richard Perle come in and see the defense minister. I told the acting secretary that was incorrect. What I had said was that if Perle came, under our standing rules, I or my deputy would accompany him to any meeting with the Defense Minister. As it happened the date Perle had proposed, I would not be in The Netherlands. Therefore my deputy, who would be the Charge, would accompany him. The acting secretary said that Weinberger was "raising hell and threatening to take the issue to the President. I replied, "Well, fine. If somebody else has a different rule, you can send out him out here as ambassador. I don't need this job. I'll be on the next plane home." That's the last we heard of that visit.

Q: Today is December 11, 2008. Jerry, we're moving to the time when you came to be in charge of terrorism. Could you explain when that was? You were doing that from when to when and what did it consist of?

BREMER: I was ambassador at large for counterterrorism from September of 1986 until February, 1989. The background of this new position was the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, which killed 143 Americans. At the time I was ambassador to the Netherlands. The attack let President Reagan to ask Vice President Bush to head an interagency task force to make recommendations to the President on how we should better organize American policy to fight terrorism. This was the biggest terrorist attack to that time and until the World Trade Center attack. Vice President Bush issued a report in late '85 that said America's counterterrorism policy was too fragmented across various

parts of the bureaucracy. It needs to be centralized and the report recommended that the central point for coordinating our policy overseas should be the State Department. Recognizing the difficulties of State coordinating a major issue, it recommended the establishment of an executive level 2 position, which is the equivalent of the deputy secretary of state, an ambassador at large for counter terrorism.

Until then the role of fighting terrorism had been pushed around the Department to the third or fourth level. A position was first set up in 1972, as a position tucked away in the office of the under secretary for management. Since then the job had been sort of pushed around in the bureaucracy.

Bush's recommendation was approved by the president. Legislation was necessary to create an Executive Level position at State and this was quickly passed by Congress.

I was ambassador to the Netherlands at this time. Soon after the legislation was passed I began to get queries from friends in the State Department about whether I would come back and become the ambassador at large of counterterrorism. My view was that first I needed to finish my job in the Netherlands which was to try to get them to agree to approve the deployment of cruise missiles. As I looked into the history of how counterterrorism had been effected in the State Department I found that the counter terrorism job as previously handled at state suggest it was a career dead end. I was not anxious to accept.

These feelers kept coming and I could tell they were coming indirectly from Secretary Shultz. He was asking people to feel me out and I kept saying no. I felt I strongly I should finish the job in the Netherlands. Which meant staying until the Dutch Parliament had voted on the cruise missiles, with the vote scheduled for the spring of 1986.

I thought I had ducked this particular bullet until late November or early December of 1985. But then in mid December I got a request from the secretary's office to meet him for breakfast in Brussels when he came over for the regular NATO ministerial meeting. Although no reason was given for the breakfast, I knew the game was up. I remember saying to Francie, "That's it." You can say no through intermediaries but you can't say no to the secretary of state. So I went down for the breakfast and George Shultz asked me to take the job. I said, "OK". He agreed with my analysis that I should stay until the vote in the Dutch parliament was taken. Then I should come back to Washington to take on this new job.

The Dutch parliament voted in favor of the cruise missiles in May and I began the process of leaving and I left in August.

Q: How did Shultz view the job because he had inherited this position sort of in the corner of his office somewhere?

BREMER: It wasn't even in his office. It was located in the office of the under secretary for management.

Q: It was tucked away but he has the legislation. Was he on board with the legislation and how did he feel about it?

BREMER: Yes, he was very strongly in favor of the legislation. He felt strongly about the fight against terrorism as did President Reagan. That made it much easier than if the secretary been against it. He was very much in favor of it.

In the spring of 1986 was the bombing of the Berlin disco by Libyan operatives. This was yet another case where Qadhafi had been sponsoring terrorism. Remember Shultz made the public statement at one point, I think about that time, "You've had it, pal". He was very strongly committed to the fight against terrorism which was a great advantage when I took the job.

Q: So you came back and took it over when?

BREMER: I came back in late August of 1986 and reported for duty the first week of September.

Since my return, but before my confirmation hearings, I had met Shultz several times. He was very clear about what the legislation said and how he viewed my position. I was now going to report directly to the secretary of state. The new designation was SC/T, "S" standing for the secretary's office. I was to report directly to him. I was replacing Bob Oakley, who was called "coordinator" for counter terrorism. To me the term "coordinator" is meaningless in an executive position. I started getting briefed in the first week of September. On Thursday of that first week a TWA plane was a hijacked on the ground in Karachi, Pakistan.

I got a call from the operations center in the middle of the night, rushed into the State Department, went up to the operations center task force area and immediately began setting up a taskforce. The bureaucratics were interesting because historically task forces dealing with terrorist incidents had been chaired by the regional bureaus -- which in most cases had been the Near East Bureau in State. This time a deputy assistant secretary from the Near East Bureau showed up about an hour after I had been there getting the taskforce organized wondering why he shouldn't be chairing the taskforce. I told him that the legislation and the Secretary's intention were clear: as Ambassador at Large for Counter Terrorism, I would chair the task force. The executive secretary at that time Mel Levitsky, agreed. So that was an important bureaucratic confirmation of Shultz's view about the role of this new position.

This hijacking did not end well. It was a Hezbollah operation. And they were demanding that the plane be flown across the Middle East to land in Algeria.

For the first time we deployed what was still then the secret Delta force from Fort Bragg to help take down the plane should that be necessary. The embassy got an officer from our consulate in Karachi out to the airport on an open line back to the embassy in

Islamabad which in turn had an open line back to us at the operations center. Communications were rather difficult in those days. CNN got a camera out to the airport and was broadcasting live pictures of the event which potentially a major problem. The year before, Hezbollah had hijacked another TWA plane in Beirut. During that event, the terrorists had started singling out the American passengers, killing them and pushing them out the door. We were concerned that managing this incident was going to be complicated if they started doing things like that and it was shown live on TV. We knew from the passenger manifest that there were Americans on board the plane in Karachi. I sent word to the American officer at the airport to find a way to get CNN cameras out of there. We were watching CNN and suddenly, some time later, the screen went dark and CNN announced they were having "technical difficulties."

Early on during the incident the TWA crew cleverly escaped from the plane. It was a 747 and that aircraft's cockpits have an escape hatch. The crew got out. By this point we had established communications with the hijackers through an Arabic speaking Pakistani on the tarmac below the aircraft -- a very brave man.

Once the crew was off, we told the hijackers that there was no crew and that TWA had no back up crew in Pakistan. So a replacement crew would have to come from Europe. This would take time; we had to mobilize them, they had to be brought in from their homes whether it was Frankfurt or elsewhere and flown to Pakistan. This was all going to take hours. We were stalling for time to get the Delta force there.

The Pakistanis had their special forces in place out of sight in the darkness outside a perimeter fence around the airplane. Suddenly, the mobile power generator that powers a plane when its engines are not on their own power ran out of kerosene and conked out. None of us had considered this problem. But by now the incident had been going on for something like 12 hours and the ATC, or whatever it's called, simple went dead. So suddenly without warning all the lights in the airplane went off. The hijackers assumed, not unreasonably, that they were about to be attacked. Our Delta force was still not in place. The hijackers started shooting wildly inside the plane. Some crew member was able to get the emergency exits open with the slides and people started coming off while the hijackers were still shooting; absolute chaos. Twenty two people were killed in the shooting. Several of the hijackers, when they realized that the game was up, tried to mingle in with the hostages fleeing the plane, pretending that they were also hostages. The hostages pointed these guys out and they got singled out and arrested by the Pakistanis. So it was not a very happy experience.

We learned something important about the terrorists' real intentions after the incident. As I mentioned, the Pakistanis were able to capture several of the hijackers. We learned that had they been able to take the plane off, rather than flying to Algeria, they intended to crash the 747 into the heart of Tel Aviv. Basically, it was a precursor for the World Trade Center attack 14 years later. Of course, we didn't realize it at the time. But it was the first time that somebody had thought to use an airplane as a terrorist weapon.

Q: As I recall it, there had been a case where an Egyptian airliner got off course and was headed towards Israel and was shot down by the Israelis because they thought and it was just a passenger plane.

BREMER: There was another specific case which I think was in the '90s involving an Air France plane that was going to be crashed into Marseilles. In any case, this was the first time that we had heard of this idea.

Q: I understand who is going to run this show and all that but at the same time, I would think a situation in the Middle East, a deputy assistant secretary in Middle Eastern Affairs would sort of have a better feel for the Middle East than you would have. How do you work that out?

BREMER: He became the deputy director of the taskforce. I looked to him for policy advice, but it was an important signal, and one Shultz was fully supportive of, that terrorism was not just a question of getting along with the regional countries. Terrorism was an international problem that needed to be addressed as an international problem and as a matter of national security.

This incident certainly didn't resolve the bureaucratic issue. There's always tension between the "specialized bureaus", whether it is International Organizations, Political Military, Human Rights, or OES or in this case, S/CT and the regional bureaus. It is a tension that is automatically there and it didn't go away. But it was an important signal.

Q: Let's take a look at the world as you saw it when you took over this job; one the role of terrorism and the role of counterterrorism.

BREMER: During this rather unpleasant hijacking with 22 people killed, Secretary Shultz was at his home in western Massachusetts. When I briefed him on the incident at the end, he said, "Well, it was quite a training exercise, wasn't it?" I had been on the job, still unconfirmed, for only three days.

I felt very strongly about terrorism. I had been around for the assassination of our ambassador and another officer in Khartoum in 1972. I had seen that happen. I had been in the executive secretariat when our embassy in Islamabad was burned down, just before our embassy in Tehran was taken over by terrorists in 1979. I knew, as many of us did, many of the hostages. My British predecessor as ambassador to The Hague had been assassinated by Irish terrorists. I had shared the outrage of the blowing up of our barracks in Beirut. There were several reported attempts to kill me in The Hague -- I don't know how credible they were. But I was on the same wavelength as the president and the secretary. This was a new form of international violence against America and the West and like the president and the secretary, I felt that it needed to be handled firmly. .

About three weeks after I was confirmed, on November 4 or 5th 1986, a story broke about an Iran hostage operation that Ollie North was running out of the White House. I knew nothing about. It had the effect of opening a trap door under American counter terrorism

policy. The basic proposition of Reagan's counterterrorism policy was we didn't negotiate with terrorists. There are no deals to be made with terrorists. These people are evil and intend to do us great harm and they must be dealt with -- by law, if possible; by force if necessary. Suddenly it was revealed that the President had been involved and had authorized the "Iran-contra" affair.

The Iran part was my concern. The "contra" part was not particularly relevant to my concern. It was as if a trap door that opened underneath our CT policy. I had an agonizing week. The story broke while I was on a trip with Shultz to Europe to try to build up support for our counterterrorism policy.

The background to that trip was a very important court case in Britain involving terrorism. In April of 1986 a Palestinian terrorist had bought tickets for his pregnant fiancée to fly on an El Al plane from London to Tel Aviv. He had planned to send a bomb on board in her checked baggage. Nice fellow! The Israelis caught him and in the course of the court proceedings it became clear that the Syrian embassy in London had been complicit in this plot. Syrian diplomats had helped move documents, false passports, and explosive materials to help this man. The court decision finding him guilty with all the deals of the Syrian government's complicity became public in the middle of October of 1986. The question was what would the Europeans do about the clear involvement of the Syrian government in a major terrorist plot?

The British were very angry and broke off diplomatic relations with Syria.

Dick Murphy, who was assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs was with us on the plane, and we discussed with Secretary Shultz what the US government should do about Syria's involvement. Shultz initially was in favor of breaking diplomatic relations as the British had done. I argued against that. My view was that breaking diplomatic relations was a kind of a one way street, very hard to go back. Murphy was naturally of the same view. Shultz eventually agreed that we should withdraw our ambassador, Bill Eagleton. So one of the Secretary's main objectives on this trip was to try to persuade the Europeans to take strong steps against Syria. Against this background, suddenly, out comes the word that our government has been negotiating with and sending money to the Iranians who are holding Americans hostage in Lebanon. It made for a very uncomfortable trip.

I remember, in particular, our last meetings were in Paris. Shultz took me along for his meeting with then Prime Minister Chirac. Chirac made a sardonic remark to the effect of weren't we just like all the Europeans because we were doing these deals with the terrorists while hypocritically criticizing the Europeans for doing the same. Shultz told Chirac that I had known nothing about this Iran-Contra operation. So he was trying to salvage some credibility with the French which subsequently turned out to be quite helpful.

We got back to Washington on a Friday night and I remember coming home and saying to Francie that I didn't feel that I could stay in this job any longer. I had only been there

three weeks but I could not in good conscience be responsible for a policy I believed in -- which was to be tough on terrorism -- while we were cutting deals with them. I remember our daughter bursting into tears at this news. Francie understood and agreed when I told her I would offer my resignation to Shultz the next day.

Saturday morning I asked to see the secretary alone. I explained that I had a real concern being responsible to carry out a policy which I considered fundamentally wrong. I said I did not want to embarrass the president. "I'll go quietly. You can shuffle me off somewhere else. But I can't in good conscience continue this job."

Shultz said that he understood but asked if I could give him some time so that we could "work the president back to reversing the policy" which at that time was still in effect. On the basis of the secretary's assurance that we would be able to reverse the policy, I agreed to stay on. It took a very difficult couple of months to get the president to finally admit publicly that the policy had been wrong and it was stopped. I think it wasn't until January. It was a very uncomfortable time during which I could do basically nothing. I had to get the policy back to where I could support it.

Q: When this news broke, how did you read the Shultz reaction to this?

BREMER: I don't remember what his reaction was. We were traveling and the story broke first in some Beirut newspaper. Hezbollah leaked it and it came into the plane as a wire service story. I wasn't sitting with Shultz when he got it. I didn't know at the time, didn't really learn until a congressional investigation latter sometime the next year, what Shultz had known about it beforehand.

Q: There were meetings and notes were taken. What were you getting from your counterterrorism people? Did they feel they had been cut off at the knees?

BREMER: You mean the people working for me? Yes, they felt the way I did which was we're going around talking about the need to have a tough, uncompromising approach to terrorism. It was a very depressing couple of months for all of us.

Q: This was emanating obviously from the White House and this was Ollie North but what were you seeing, who was, what was the rationale behind this and who was pushing this?

BREMER: I couldn't tell at the time. I really didn't know until quite a bit later when all of the story came out about the president's concern about the hostages. What I could tell and what I did say to Shultz was that the policy of paying for the hostages didn't work. AI pointed out to him, we had more hostages being held when the story broke than when the program began. So even putting aside the principle of violating our own policy, as a practical matter, the policy wasn't working. It was creating the opposite effect by making every American -- first in the Middle East and eventually anywhere in the world -- a potential target for these guys because we were willing to pay top dollar for them. I felt

very strongly it was the wrong policy which is why I said I would have to resign. I just couldn't carry it out.

Q: Back to my initial question about what was the world of terrorism? Where were the centers? I served in Italy and we were worried about the Red Brigade and the Prima Linea. Could you talk a bit about as you we saw the world of terrorism at that time?

BREMER: At the time terrorism effectively had two dimensions -- what came to be called "old-style" terrorists and the new ones. The old style terrorists were almost all Marxist organizations, many based in Europe, some in South America. In the European case, they tended to be homegrown: Red Brigade in Italy, the Bader Meinhof gang in Germany, Action Directe in France, the Communist Combatant Cells (CCC) in Belgium. These groups were anti-American and in European cases also strongly opposed to NATO. Their objective was to get the U.S. out of Europe. They conducted terrorism as a tactic to get attention for their cause or get terrorists that had been previously arrested out of jail. They would carry out an attack and say, "Let those guys out or we'll do this or we'll do that."

There were also Middle Eastern terrorists especially after the Six Day War: the hijackings of 1970 of various airliners to Jordan, the attack at the Olympics of 1972 where Israelis were targeted. So there was a thread of Middle Eastern terrorism. What we saw in the early '80s was that the European governments were finally starting to get serious about dealing with the homegrown terrorists. These old terrorists, you might call them, had really overplayed their hand. Bader Meinhof had killed Hans-Martin Schleyer, one of Germany's leading industrialists. The Red Brigades had killed the former prime minister in Italy. These groups had overplayed their hands and the public outrage had finally translated itself into more political attention to the European terrorist problems, starting in the early '80s. The Europeans were starting gradually to come together.

But meanwhile this new strain appeared and grew, virulent Middle Eastern terrorism with state sponsors of Iran, Syria and Libya. That terrorism had shown its face most dramatically in attacks in Lebanon in 1983, against the Marine barracks and American embassy attacks and on French targets there. The Libyans attacked a Berlin disco in 1985 which killed two American servicemen. We also started to see some level of coordination and cooperation between the two threads on matters like finances and safe houses. The most important aspect, the thing that really challenged us then and I would argue for the next 20 years, was the state sponsorship of terrorism, in particular Iran and Libya, and to a lesser extent Syria at this time.

The diplomatic challenge we had was to encourage the Europeans to do more among themselves to combat the old style terrorists. We found there was a lot more coordination among the old style terrorists -- Red Brigades, Bader Meinhof, Action Directe -- than there was among the governments they were attacking. We kept saying, "Why should the terrorist groups be better organized than you are?"

The Europeans eventually established a committee called the Trevi group in what was then the European Community. It was an agreement that the European ministers of interior and justice would meet regularly to address problems of terrorism. This presented the United States with two problems: first, we are not members of the European Community. So we wanted to find some way for us to be involved in order to share our intelligence and learn what they had.

Secondly the objective of the group was largely based on the idea that terrorists were criminals. That's why they had the ministers of justice involved, which was fair enough as far as it went. But our view was it didn't go far enough because the group didn't address the problem of the state sponsors who were using terrorism for political purposes. This meant the problem was bigger than just dealing with criminals.

For the first few months after the Iran Contra affair exploded and until the president had finally said publicly that it had been a mistake, our counter terrorist team had to focus on improving the mechanics of better cooperation with friends and allies. There was very little to be said for me going out and making great speeches about how we had to be tough on terrorists when everybody knew we had been doing these deals with the Iranians. So we focused on building out systems, networks of cooperation with the Europeans on intelligence, criminal matters with ministers of interior and justice.

Q: In the first place, you say the ministers of justice get together. Most of these are political appointees rotating in European things. There wasn't much continuity of your expertise there outside of giving an imprimatur on actions but there must, was there an underlying professional network of intelligence people dealing with this or were we, everybody concerned, putting this back together?

BREMER: Well, we had mostly to pull it together. I looked at the legislation which outlined my authorities and knew that I was supported by the president and secretary. So I insisted we had to have a vigorous interagency process in the American government. So I had, for example, people seconded to our office in State from the JCS, from the FBI, eventually from the Special Forces, CIA and DEA.

Q: JCS?

BREMER: The Joint Chiefs of Staff. So we had in the State Department an active, interagency operation. We met regularly with the people at the office of the assistant secretary of defense for low intensity conflict, Rich Armitage and at the NSC which was Ollie North until he left. So we had an active interagency approach involving intelligence people and people from other parts of the executive branch including the American department of Justice and the Treasury.

None of the Europeans had anything like this. Everything was totally stove piped in Europe. The minister of interior in a European country did his thing, the minister of justice, the minister of foreign affairs did theirs with very little coordination. We came up with the idea of having "joint commissions" with key countries. We started with Britain

first which was the easiest because they understand interagency coordination and second, because it is the most open intelligence relationship that we have so that it is relatively easy to share intelligence.

After we had a bilateral commission meeting with the British, we proposed similar bilateral interagency meetings with the other Europeans, starting with the French. We told them that we would be bringing reps from our various agencies to the meetings and suggested that they bring reps from their various intelligence services; the ministry of interior, the ministry of foreign affairs. In France when we went to these meetings in Paris, it was the first time many of the French bureaucrats had ever met each other-civil servants from their ministries of interior, justice and foreign affairs for example. There was little existing cooperation within the European bureaucracies.

Q: Were there objections of, who are the Americans to try to get us to reorganize or that sort of thing?

BREMER: Of course, there was resistance. It was a long struggle. It took, I would say, until the middle of 1987, at least seven or eight months after Iran Contra began, to get some credibility back into our policy.

I think I made my first public statements not before the second quarter of '87. We really had to lie low and just work at it until we could get some credibility back.

Q: We have gone through the 9/11 Commission and all that where our people weren't sharing information. Was this in a way the first effort to try and to share information, would you say?

BREMER: Yes, it was and we weren't entirely successful. One question we were looking at was, that still haunts us, was how do we ensure that terrorists don't get visas to the United States, which, after all, starts with the State Department responsibility of the consular officer. Our S/CT team looked into the question of how does this work. Those were pre-internet days and in many embassies in the world, the "lookout list" was a microfiche shipped out to the posts once a month or once a quarter. If you were a hypothetical consular officer at a post somewhere in the world and "Abdul Aziz" comes in for a visa, you crank up the little microfiche and see if his name is there, which requires you to send a cable saying that you need an advisory opinion from Washington.

So that raised a couple of questions: where does the look out list come from and how can it be made more current for consular officers at post? It turned out there were lots of lists floating around; there was a DEA list, there was a FBI list, there was a CIA list, at least one CIA list, there was a DIA list, there was a State Department list. There were lists all over the place, This problem still hasn't been solved 25 years later, And at that time there was no master list to the check the name against since many of our agencies did not cooperate. So there was no way to ensure that when our hypothetical consular officer sat down to face Mr. Abdul Aziz, he had actually the views of all of the relevant agencies. The immigrations and naturalization service, INS, would face the same problem when

Mr. Aziz came to apply at the port of entry. Those people had their own set of lists, Customs too. I remember explaining these problems to the attorney general, Ed Meese and saying we should not welcome the day that it turns out that the State Department has issued a visa and INS has allowed the entry of somebody who was a terrorist and was known by one of these lists as a terrorist but was not on the list that State and INS referred to when making the decision on his travel.

Even such sharing as there was very inefficient. For example, the CIA did share a list with the State Department on a regular basis. But the list was brought physically on a tape from Langley down to consular affairs at the State Department once a month. Then the names were hand checked against the existing names and any additional ones were typed in manually to the microfiche. It was extremely inefficient and there was a huge time delay in producing the list and actually putting it into the hands of the visa-issuing officer. And the Agency had another back up list which often included the most threatening people. But it was not shared with State because they didn't want to reveal sources and methods, and I assume, some of those people were also possible recruits or controlled agents. But there was a way to deal with this, I argued. Set up the architecture of the system so the consular officer doesn't have to know why Abdul Aziz is on the list. All he needs to have is a red flag that says "don't give him a visa" without first referring the case to Washington. Back home State knows this guy is on the second Agency list for some reason and refers it to the Agency and the Agency says, "It's OK, let him in" or they say, "Don't let him in." Eventually this "flagging system" was adopted.

The problem of coordination among the agencies on just this one issue plagued us then and as you pointed out, continued to plague the US government right through 9/11. My understanding is it continues to plague us.

Q: It does and particularly in the Middle East where you say Aziz. The names are, I tried to run a filing system on immigrant applicants when I was in Dhahran and you know, the Muhammads ran, it is almost impossible.

Was there a good cadre of counterintelligence, I mean counter terrorists people, not just within the State Department but in other places or was this sort of a job that has been shifted over to, you know, wasn't treated very seriously?

BREMER: For many years, counter terrorism certainly had not been treated seriously at State. There were very good people, particularity in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. In INR we had an extremely able group, but there were very few of them.

Q: Do you remember any of them?

BREMER: Phil Koznik. I inherited in the S/CT office some dedicated people; Joe Reap, our press spokesman, he had been working on that for some years. Mike Kraft who had been doing congressional relations, a very important interest in terrorism. The problem was that in the State Department counter terrorism had been an issue that nobody at the highest level took very seriously until Shultz came. Therefore, it had little bureaucratic

influence which meant that personnel people had tended not to assign the best people. Eventually we got a good strong team there mainly because Shultz really believed strongly. I knew that I could go to Shultz directly if I had to and everybody in the building knew that. So it gave us some bureaucratic leverage. But you don't go to your boss everyday complaining. You have to pick your fights.

Q: How did you find your liaison with the FBI, the CIA and DEA and others?

BREMER: I have said often that our office's relations with other departments was better than our relations with other bureaus in the State Department. At the agency there was a strong team of people who believed in dealing with terrorism. The Agency set up the counterterrorism center, a center that brought together people from the both the Operation and Intelligence sides of the agency -- the first time they had ever done that. It was the first integrated center in CIA history. So we had good support there. We had good support at the Pentagon on both the OSD(Secretary of Defense) and military sides. We had very good support from the FBI with whom we ran some counter terrorist operations.

The problem often was getting cooperation from the bureaus in the State Department. If I am the assistant secretary for the Near East, I don't want to have terrorist problems. It is a problem; that I understood. It is a problem for me with relations with Malaysia or with Iran or relations with whomever. It's a problem that many diplomats, in America and in other foreign offices, considered peripheral to "core" political and economic relations.

Q: At the time we did not have relations with Libya.

BREMER: Nor with Iran.

Q: We had relations with Syria but obviously strained.

BREMER: As a result of the attempted bombing of the El Al plane we discussed, we did pull the ambassador out of Syria, in late '86.

Q: This is always the signal. You take your top person dealing when a problem reaches critical level, and then you take your top person out.

BREMER: About two months after the ambassador was withdrawn, predictably, the Near East Bureau said that now it is time to send the ambassador back. He is desperately needed there because he is the only one that President Assad will talk to, he's our channel of communication to the President who is the guy who makes all the decisions. So I had my guys look into it. How many times in the year and a half that the ambassador had been there, before he was withdrawn, had our ambassador met with Assad? Once, when he had presented credentials just after he arrived at post. So the argument that we had to send him back because he was the channel to Assad was nonsense.

I wasn't against sending him back but I wanted to get something for it, especially since sending him back meant nothing in terms of our ability to communicate with the Syrians.

At the time Syria was host to a half dozen terrorist groups. One was Abu Nidal, a vicious Palestinian terrorist who had moved his headquarters from Beirut to Damascus. I argued to the Secretary that we should not send the ambassador back until they expelled Abu Nidal, Shultz agreed to this condition and we hung tough until they expelled Abu Nidal in the spring of 1986. That was the end of his organization as an effective terrorist group; it actually worked getting him out of there. Then we could send our ambassador back.

Q: Still sticking within our government, how were we treating Libya? Had the Lockerbie thing happened by this time?

BREMER: No, that was in 1988. What had happened before when I was still in The Hague, was the Libyan bombing of the disco in Berlin.. We talked about it before.

Libya was pretty high on the list of terrorist supporting states. Iran was the highest. Still is.

Q: How did you find intelligence of local, say particularly within the European complex? You would think the French would have had, and the Germans too, a pretty good handle on who was doing what to whom in their countries.

BREMER: The intelligence against the old terrorists that we talked about, the homegrown, Marxist Leninist groups, Action Directe, had gotten to be pretty good by the mid-'80s because of the outrage over those attacks in the late '70s. The intelligence directed against the Middle East terrorists, Hezbollah in particular and Palestinian terrorists, was not as highly developed by the Europeans. Ours was better. One of the things we had to do in these bilateral commissions and in our bilateral discussions was to try to persuade the Europeans to pay more attention to what was sometimes called "spill over Middle East terrorism"

Consider for example, the French. They had long, historic relations with in the Middle East. They had the same kind of pressures in their government as we did in ours, particularly within their foreign ministry, which tended to be of the view that we shouldn't upset the apple cart in the Middle East.

But we could track Palestinian terrorists coming and going in Europe. Indeed, we found that some of the governments in Europe, the Greeks, for example, had cut deals where they had said to some Palestinian terrorist groups, "Look, if you don't do attacks on our territory, we will look the other way when you guys transit through here." We considered this completely unacceptable and where we had evidence we could share with the Europeans we did.

Q: In the mid-'70s, there had been an attack against, when I was consul general in Athens and some Palestinian terrorists had attacked a Pan Am flight, I think it was. And then after a while, they let them go.

BREMER: Well, this was a pattern in several of the countries.

By the mid-'80s the French were beginning to take it more seriously because Hezbollah started operating inside France and killing Frenchmen. They conducted bomb attacks against targets like a left-bank café that was known to be frequented by French Jews. It was attacked and a number of people killed. The French don't take lightly when you start killing French people on French soil.

The French had a very tough minister of interior, Charles Pasqua. He was a tough Corsican who some time after I retired, did some jail time. His deputy was a guy named Pondreau who was also a Corsican. These were two very tough characters and they were good. They were very cooperative.

One Tuesday afternoon, probably in early 1988, I had a call from Pasqua asking me to fly over the Paris that night for some "important information". Neither I nor our intelligence agencies knew what was up. When I got to the Minister's fancy office the next morning, he told me that some weeks earlier they had discovered a cache of arms and explosives buried in the Bois de Boulogne. They had staked out the site and on Monday they had arrested a group of Hezbollah terrorists trying to recover the materials. What was important -- and new -- Pasqua said, was the declared objective of the terrorists was to establish the "Islamic Republic of France." In the late 1980s, this struck me as a fantasy. We had to wait another decade to take such threats seriously.

The Greeks were always a problem. During that time and for some time afterwards, the Greeks had shown themselves incapable of dealing with their homegrown terrorist group, November 15th. That group had killed our station chief in '75 and continued to conduct bombings and assassinations in Greece. We had intelligence that suggested the possibility that November 15th had connections with the then-socialist government. So the Greeks were a problem. They either would not or could not take effective steps against their homegrown terrorists, unlike the French, the Germans, and Italians. A lot of Palestinian terrorists seemed to be moving rather freely through Greece, which led to an interesting operation.

I should mention the Spanish. Like the British they faced a different kind of terrorism. In the British case it was the Irish terrorists, religious based. In Spain it was ethnic-based Basque terrorists. Eventually the Spanish government started to take seriously the Basque problem. One of the difficulties the Spanish had was that the Basques then and even today use France as their R&R area. That's where they did and still do a lot of the planning -- in the Basque region on the southwest side of France.

For a long time the French had effectively turned a blind eye to this, saying in effect, "Well, it's not really our problem. They're not doing attacks on French soil; they're just attacking in Spain." We persuaded the French intelligence people who had actionable intelligence about where these guys were, that they really ought to try to be more cooperation with the Spanish. That began and has subsequently continued and we see, just last week, the French arrested one of these Basques.

I don't say this would not have happened without our encouragement. It might very well have happened. But we tried to encourage the Europeans to work together more, to be at least as coordinated as the terrorists seemed to be and to start taking seriously the Middle East terrorism problem.

Q: Was the development of the European Union; was there a subheading of anti-terrorism? Was that just not in their

BREMER: At this time it was the European Community (EC)

Q: As it was developing, was there, was that on the agenda?

BREMER: The Trevi group was the EC's coordinating unit. Its mandate was broader. It was directed at criminal activity as well but it also dealt with terrorism. Because America was not a member of the European Community, we had to find a way to coordinate. We wound up getting a way where we would meet. Trevi met twice a year, always under the chairmanship of the Minister of Interior of the country then in the Chair of the EC. So if the French had the EC presidency, the French minister of interior would chair the Trevi group meeting. He would be accompanied by the "Trevi Troika" which meant the Minister who had just finished his 6 month stint as Chairman, and the next chairman. Since the United States could not be present at the actual Trevi meeting, we worked out a system whereby our "minister of justice", the attorney general, Ed Meese, and our CT team would meet the Europeans before and after their formal Trevi meeting. That gave us some ability to make an input into their agenda and to get information about what had been discussed and decided at the Trevi. It was a way for the United States to stay engaged, though not formally, with the European Community's counterterrorism efforts.

Q: One element that hasn't been mentioned and that is particularly Israeli intelligence and all that which must have been a major player but also a problematic one because they in a way had more of a stake in the situation.

BREMER: We did set up a bilateral commission with working groups with the Israelis like the ones we had established with the British, French, Italians and Germans. Israeli intelligence, of course, was very valuable to us on Middle Eastern terrorist groups. I don't remember it causing us any particular problems.

Q: I was wondering whether the Israelis might be, they had their own, obviously anti-Palestinian thing and whether you felt some of the information they gave might be tainted to get rid of legitimate leaders or not?

BREMER: I don't remember it being an issue.

Q: Still looking at the world of terrorism, what about the Shining Path and the Japanese Red Army and other ones? Were these on our agenda? Some Japanese had attacked our embassy in Malaysia.

BREMER: The Japanese were on our agenda in this sense. The Japanese terrorist group, the Red Army faction, had a major training camp in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. There were 12 camps operated by various terrorist groups in the valley. As I mentioned one of our arguments with the Syrians was that a number of terrorists groups had their headquarters openly in Damascus. I mentioned Abu Nidal. There were a number of other Palestinian terrorists groups operating openly in Damascus -- the PFLP, the PFLP-GC, the DFLP-a whole alphabet of them. There were also these major training camps, the Red Army was one of them, in the Bekaa Valley which was essentially controlled by the Syrians.

But during the time I was there, Koreans blew an airliner out of the air.

Q: The North Koreans?

BREMER: The North Koreans. It wasn't as if we weren't paying attention to Asia. It was a problem in many places. Sendero Luminoso was a murderous group, Marxist Leninist group, in Peru. We had reasonably good cooperation with the Peruvians and with the Colombians who also faced the FARC, their homegrown terrorist group. The Colombian president at that time asked our CT team come down to brief him and his cabinet on how the USG had organized its CT efforts. I led an interagency team from the State Department, the CIA and the Defense Department to meet him and his group. We had similar meetings in Peru. So we paid attention to the problem in Latin America. But the major problem was Middle Eastern terrorists.

Q: Was there any thing we could do? I mean we did the bombing in Libya. Did that seem to slow things down?

BREMER: Yes, it actually did.

Q: My understanding, but at the same time it did spark the Lockerbie operation or not?

BREMER: No. Lockerbie was a different matter and we should get to that at the end. That was later.

After our bombing of Tripoli in 1986, we saw a noticeable falloff in Libyan terrorist activities. We were watching lots of Libyan operators in intelligence services, particularly in Europe, and there was a noticeable falloff. You know, Qadhafi like most people like him, is basically a coward. In the fall of 2003, after we invaded Iraq over WMD, Qadhafi gave up his nuclear program. He could see what was coming. In many respect the same thing had happened after the 1986 attack. He didn't go out of business; we still had problems with him; but he went to a different strategy. His new approach was to arm the IRA, the Irish Republican Army. The British intercepted a number of ships with large quantities of explosives and weapons intended for the IRA in Ireland. So he went a more indirect approach where he was supporting terrorist groups rather than attacking directly. But he certainly didn't go out of business.

Q: Did you run across the political buzz saw of the IRA and what they were doing and the Boston Irish and Senator Kennedy and Tip O'Neil?

BREMER: Our view was that contributions to the North Ireland Relief Organization was supporting the IRA. Some of it no doubt went for good things. But the intelligence indicated that much was going to the terrorists. This was an issue that came up. I can't say that I fought very hard on the subject. It was a subject I commented on a number of times in the press. But there were, as you point out, a number of leading Irish-American politicians who defended the right of people to collect money for the Irish relief. The fungibility of money going to groups like this is always a problem.

Q: Was the Armenian Liberation Army a problem or not?

BREMER: No.

Q: Were there any homegrown terrorist groups? This was a period when we were concerned about all these so-called militias.

BREMER: You are talking about in the United States?

Q: In the United states.

BREMER: Well, I am sure there were.

Q: Was this something that fell within

BREMER: No. The legislation creating the post of Ambassador at Large concerned international terrorism outside the United States. Now if Hezbollah was operating, as they were, cells in Michigan and if Abu Nidal had, as he did, cells in various places inside the US, the FBI paid attention and had action authority. We would discuss those issues in our interagency meetings. Arrests were made; but it was not part of my mandate.

Q: How about Canada and the Sikhs and other people? I mean did we see Canada as being kind of a weak link at the time?

BREMER: I wouldn't say Canada was a weak link. It was one of the countries we set up these bilateral commissions with. We had concerns about the Canadian border, not necessarily that the Canadians were soft. After all you are talking about a 3,000 mile border through some pretty remote territories, if you get into Montana and places like that.

We had an interesting case that I used as an example of how everybody can help in the fight against terrorism. A couple of Palestinian terrorists come across the border in Vermont, making their way south in a car. I can't remember why, but an alert deputy sheriff in some little town in Vermont got suspicious about the way these people were

behaving. Somehow he got to talking to them, found out they had come into the US illegally. That gave him the right to look in their car. They turned out to be Palestinians. He found bomb making materials in the trunk of the car and they were arrested.

A similar example happened just before the Millennium when an alert customs officer in Washington State found somebody on their way to blow up the Los Angeles airport and just noticed something a little out of the ordinary.

Q: You were essentially laying low after the Iran-Contra exposure for a while. Building up your, particularly your European interlocutors, were they sympathetic saying, "OK, this is a stupid move but let's get on with it"?

BREMER: Yes. What I found and I think people have found since then, the intelligence people in the ministries in the European capitals looked at terrorism as a potential law and order threat and something they had to deal with. They didn't pay much attention to what the people at the Quai d'Orsay or national foreign ministry were saying. When you got over into the diplomatic side, you got people sort of thumbing their nose at us, saying, "you guys did this and that -- who are you to tell us how to treat this threat?" But the people who had the practical responsibility of doing something about terrorism tended to just continue working against the terrorists. That's why we emphasized in the first months not the big public discussion of the fight on terrorism because I didn't think we had a very good platform to stand on until we rebuilt our credibility. So our emphasis was on the day to day, the practical. We came up with an acronym ITAP -- which stood for a practical action program: Identify, Track, Apprehend and Punish the terrorists. We had a real focus on the practicality to build a base so we could rebuild a credible counter terrorist policy.

Q: In a way, you had a new job and it wasn't just working on the structure within the government but within the international community.

BREMER: Well, in the end the international community was what I was most responsible for. Before we could do much there, we had to establish some system within the U.S. government and some mechanism for exercising a degree of influence over what the U.S. government did. Then we had to find a way to be credible overseas in the wake of Iran Contra.

Q: Early on did you find that the CIA and the FBI, you know, the FBI had internal enemies, the CIA had external enemies and in a way they were sort of jealous of their dukedoms and all that.

BREMER: Yes, particularly the FBI. The FBI has a well-deserved reputation for being one of the most acquisitive and contentious bureaucracies in Washington. They are wonderful professionals, but it is a very tough bureaucracy and guards its terrain vigilantly where necessary, throwing around charges of obstruction of justice that tend to get your attention when you are trying to work on a problem.

The relations our office had with the Agency were excellent. They were a real ally. I think they understood that in the broadest sense if we were going to succeed in getting at these terrorists, they were going to have to have some political and diplomatic cover. It wasn't just going to be a question of doing covert operations and blowing up people. You were going to have to have a broader approach. The Agency, I thought, did quite well.

The Bureau tended to try to assert its authority more aggressively; particularly it began to assert authority overseas.

Q: We have more and more offices overseas.

BREMER: They had already started opening posts at Embassies abroad and then a law was passed that gave them jurisdiction over any American who was murdered overseas. There were tensions from time to time with the Bureau. It was quite clear, even then, that the Bureau and the Agency were not sharing intelligence very well. This was an issue that came much more dramatically to my attention when I was chairman of the National Commission on Terrorism ten years later. One of the Commission's major recommendations was the need to share better intelligence which two years later became one of the "lessons of 9/11". There was a tension between the Bureau and the Agency, though we were able to pull off some operations against terrorists where the case cooperation between the two was excellent.

Q: How long were you doing this?

BREMER: A little less than three years, '86 to '89.

Q: Today is January 7, 2009. We are talking about your time dealing with terrorism, right? We had talked about your evaluation of the FBI and the CIA, particularly how the FBI was very territorial about what it had but we really haven't talked about things that were going on at this time.

BREMER: I became ambassador for counterterrorism in September of 1986.

The situation we faced was a clear uptick in what later became known as Islamic-based terrorism. We had experience the Hezbollah attack on the American embassy and the Marine barracks in 1983 in Lebanon. By the mid-'80s we were seeing what we called spillover Mideast terrorism in Europe, particularly Hezbollah in France, but also some of the Palestinian terrorists groups operating around Europe. We had not yet seen, other than the attack on the Marine barracks in Lebanon, the kind of mass casualty terrorism that we were going to find at the end of my assignment with Pan Am 103.

As 1987 opened, we had a serious political problem with the Europeans because we had been preaching to them for five or six years, really even starting in the Carter administration, to be tough on terrorists was the right response, and here we were, with Iran-Contra, going behind their backs doing business with the Iranians and Hezbollah.

Among other things we worked to expand our training programs, called the ATA, the anti-terrorism action program, where we trained foreign government police, intelligence services and in the end also special forces for practical ways to fight terrorists.

Gradually, over the course of probably the first six months of 1987 or so we were able to again kind of get our feet under us and begin to focus and get some cooperation from the Europeans.

Q: Could you explain for someone looking at this Hezbollah? How did we view Hezbollah at that time?

BREMER: We viewed Hezbollah as the world's most dangerous terrorist group.

Q: What was their origin?

BREMER: They were created by Iran. It is a Shiite terrorist group based in Lebanon. They receive virtually all of their support -- money and arms -- from Iran. The Iranians had a regular 737 flight from Tehran to the airport in Damascus. With obvious Syrian help, the weapons, ammunition and money were escorted across the Syrian border into the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. The Bekaa Valley abuts the Syrian border and that's where many of the Hezbollah and terrorist camps for another ten or so terrorist groups as we discussed.

So Hezbollah was created as a cat's paw of the Iranian revolutionary government after the takeover of the government in 1979. They were operating actively in Europe, in particular in France, and conducting terrorist attacks or killing Frenchmen.

Q: How did the French operate, vis-a-vis, the Hezbollah in France?

BREMER: The French bureaucratic situation was complicated because, first, the Ministry of Interior, which was charged with combating terrorism had a problem with the Quai d'Orsay, the foreign Ministry, which was not sympathetic to the idea of putting pressure on these groups, and particularly not on Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini had spent his exile in France, so there was a kind of French connection with the revolutionary government in Tehran.

Also the French police structure was complicated. There was an internal security force, an external security organization, the Gendarmerie Nationale and local police forces with little coordination among the groups. Indeed, when we finally proposed a joint commission along the lines of the one we had established with Britain, the French took quite a while to try to figure out who was going to come and represent France at our first bilateral meeting. When we had the first meeting in Paris, we were interested to learn that in many cases it was the first time the French officials had ever talked to each other. We felt it was quite an achievement just to get all these guys in the same room, get them

talking to each other and thinking about terrorism as we had tried to do across interagency boundaries in Washington.

Q: Had you found that, were the Quai d'Orsay, were they seeing this as opportunities to deal with Iran and in a way stick it to the Americans and all?

BREMER: There was certainly some of that. There was a certain, not unusual, rather Gaullist view that they needed to do something that was not what the Americans did. There was a diplomatic view in the Quai that they ought to try to find a way to get along with the Iranians even though Hezbollah had also killed scores of Frenchmen in Beirut at the same time as the attack on our barracks. So we had to work around the Quai d'Orsay which made American-French coordination difficult.

So we set up these bilateral CT commissions. We set one up in Spain we did one in Italy, another in France, and one with Canada. We eventually did one with Israel. We waited until we had several set up in Europe before we did one with Israel because of the political sensitivity of doing that.

We achieved two other diplomatic efforts. One was the problem of how to coordinate with the European Community. We discussed earlier how we were able to effect coordination by working quietly out of sight with the EC's Trevi group. That was an important and useful mechanism to coordinate American and European counterterrorism policy.

The second success was to get terrorism on the agenda of the yearly Group of 7 summit meetings. We got terrorism on the agenda there, usually with the support of the British and usually against the objections of the French.

Q: Speaking of getting everybody on board, how did you find your home office, the State Department and the embassies? Were you treading on toes? How did this work?

BREMER: The situation in the State Department was some of the regional bureaus did not support the idea that fighting terrorism should be a priority of our foreign policy. This was an issue particularly in the Near East Bureau because the issue obviously had the potential to make bilateral relations more complicated -- for example, as we discussed, we pulled our ambassador out of Syria. But the European bureau too was able to control its enthusiasm for fighting the spill over terrorism in Europe. Again largely for understandable concern that the issue might upset our overall bilateral relations -- a case that several European foreign ministries were not reluctant to make. .

The State Department was not at all enthusiastic about counterterrorism. I don't think my experience was different from my successors.

Q: How about the embassies?

BREMER: That varied. We had an excellent station chief in Paris and a supportive deputy there and we were able to work well with the French, particularly with the intelligence and security services. The problem really came up with embassies in the Middle East and, in one particular case, in Greece.

The Foreign Service in those days did not accept that talking about terrorism was legitimately a high priority for the U.S. government. Fortunately for me, President Reagan and Secretary Shultz felt very strongly about the fight against terrorism. Without that, I would not have been able do anything much in the State Department on this subject. This responsibility of fighting terrorism had been buried by the State Department bureaucratically for 15 years. It was not a subject the average diplomat wanted to talk about. He thought it would upset, as it probably would sometimes, bilateral relations.

Q: By the time you got these meetings, did you leave any permanent structure?

BREMER: We built a structure in the three areas I mentioned; more intense bilateral cooperation, particularly with some of the difficult countries like France and Spain. Britain was taken for granted. An acceptance on the part of the European Community that the United States had a legitimate interest in what they were discussing among themselves in this special Trevi group, and an understanding that the United States was going to continue to insist on high level attention to the fight against terrorism, in those days in particular through the regular discussions at the summit meetings of the G-7. It began to lay the groundwork for broader counterterrorism training in the United States of other countries, not so much European countries, but Latin American countries, for example. There was a fair amount of terrorism in Columbia and Peru and we were able to intensify our training in counterterrorism with those countries. So we were able to take a number of practical steps forward had some important successes.

Q: Obviously there are other, you mentioned Latin America: the Shining Path and other various groups in Columbia. Did we have within our apparatus or in these other countries good focus just on Islam and what was motivating the terrorism that was of a religious basis?

BREMER: I would say it was beginning to become clear that the face of terrorism had changed. Modern terrorism exploded on us in the aftermath of the ’67 Arab Israeli war. Arabs, some of them, came to the conclusion that they couldn’t defeat Israel with conventional military means. This was the third time they had tried and the third time they had failed. They turned to what we now call asymmetric warfare, terrorism, with a series of major attacks and hijackings in 1970 in Jordan, eventually the attack on Israelis in Munich at the Olympics in 1972.

In the ‘70s we experienced a different kind of terrorism, the secular Marxist terrorism of groups like Action Directe, the Red Brigades, the CCC in Belgium, Bader Meinhof. Towards the end of the ‘70s these homegrown European terrorists, had overplayed their hand. The Europeans began to take it more seriously and as I mentioned, started coordinating.

Underneath it, there was still lingering Middle Eastern terrorism. The initial Middle Eastern terrorism, the PFLP-GC, the PFLP were secular Marxist groups. They were not fundamentalist, religious. Hezbollah was the new face -- an avowedly Shiite group created and sponsored by the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran.

Q: You were there sort of at the time when all this sort of turned into sort of the Jihadists or whatever you call it.

BREMER: I think it would be wrong to say we saw that at that time. I think -- but only in retrospect -- that the signal event was probably the attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. The thing that really brought the new threat home was blowing up Pan Am 103 in December 1988. Terrorism was in a transition phase; the Europeans by the middle of the 1980s had by and large defeated those homegrown Marxist secular groups and so now we were facing a new kind of group. I don't think we had a vision of quite how serious the religious fanaticism was. That was to come to us later.

Q: The blowing up of the barracks was, I mean it wasn't obvious at first but it was the first really major suicide bombing, wasn't it?

BREMER: Right.

Q: Prior to that it had been people you know, putting their pregnant girlfriend on with loaded suitcases and all.

BREMER: At the end of 1988, I commissioned a study by the CIA to go back through all the international terrorist incidents we had recorded since 1968 when we started collecting data, go back through the thousands and thousands and tell me what per cent of those attacks involved suicides. It was less than 2%, 1.8% which showed an important thing. The data showed that the vast majority of the terrorists operating for two decades did not want to die in the attempt. They didn't want to go to jail, they wanted to get away. So the concept of treating terrorists as criminals, catching them, making them stand before the bar of justice, putting them in jail, made sense as a strategy.

What I found ten years later, after I had retired and became chairman of the bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism, was a completely different picture. Now many terrorists were prepared to die, in fact eager to die. Therefore the threat of "bringing them to justice" and making them face life in prison was much less relevant to fighting these new terrorists. This transition started in the '80s. I can't say it was clear to us at that time. It wasn't.

Q: Was there anyone at the NSC who was sort of Mr. or Ms. Terrorism at that point?

BREMER: On an operational basis, Colonel Ollie North was the representative and what we called the counterterrorist working group. He was the NSC representative.

Q: He's not sort of a Richard Clarke?

BREMER: He was a sort of Richard Clarke in the sense that he was operational. As we discussed before, shortly after I came back to the CT job, the Central Intelligence Agency had established their counterterrorism center, CTC, bringing together professional intelligence analysts and operators who were real pros in fighting terrorism.

Colonel North was more operational and he was the one running the hostages program that caused all the problems with the credibility of American policy when it became know.

Q: While you were there, were we looking at eliminating nests of terrorism or not?

BREMER: Absolutely. One of the arguments in the counterterrorism community in those days was to look back at what President Reagan had done after the bombing of the Beirut barracks. You may recall he sent elements of the Sixth Fleet to steam offshore of Lebanon, some of these old World War II battleships. They shelled the Chouf Mountains behind Beirut. Most of the people in the Chouf Mountains were Druze, they weren't Shiites. What we were doing was firing these 16 inch guns which puts a shell about the size of a Volkswagen on the target. These went into villages where we were just killing people and not the right people.

So there was a view among those of us working on it that that kind of operation, which might make you feel good and might look good politically for a day or two, really wasn't the very useful, wasn't the right thing to do. What you needed to do was go after the leadership and try to get them.

Q: How do you go after leadership if they are sitting in Syria or Iran?

BREMER: The biggest problem in counterterrorism then and today is getting good intelligence, and we didn't have much of a human operation at that time.

Q: It's very difficult.

BREMER: This is the hardest intelligence target there is.

I remember we had an intelligence report of someone who had volunteered to join Sendero Luminoso, the Marxist terrorist group in Peru. He was a radical student; he wanted to join these people. So he went around and found some of these guys and said he would like to join and they said, "Well, we are always looking for volunteers. What you have to do is kill that policeman." And they gave the name of the policeman and where he was and told him once he had killed the policeman he would have established his credibility. "Then come back and we'll consider your joining our group." Well, that's a pretty high threshold and it showed the problem of trying to infiltrate these terrorist groups. The terrorist groups in the Middle East had the classic cellular structure that Marxists groups had developed so well for their operations over the decades of the 20th

century -- very small cells where people knew each other only by first names, nobody knew who the boss was and the boss didn't know who his bosses were. Even if you could somehow get an agent into one of these cells, which was not easy, the ability of that person to produce useful, actionable intelligence was pretty limited because of the cellular structure. So this is a very hard target.

I will give you an example of the kind of intelligence we were able to get and use, two examples, maybe three.

We knew from our intelligence that one of the key leaders of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the man who had been personally responsible for killing Americans in hijackings there was a fellow named Imad Mughniyah. The FBI was able to get a grand jury to issue a sealed indictment for murder of an American. This was not made public. We looked for opportunities to somehow get him.

There was a hijacking of I think, it was an Air France plane. It started somewhere in the Middle East. We found out that Mughniyah was on this plane as one of the hijackers. The plane landed in Cyrus and we tried to get it stopped there but the Cypriots let it fly on. It then went landed in Algiers. When it landed in Algiers we felt we had an opportunity to have Mughniyah detained by the Algerian police. Then one way or another we might then get him under American control and confront him with the justice he deserved.

The Algerians parked the plane off in a very remote area of the airfield at night, as was the practice with a hijacked plane. We still did not reveal our objective, and pushed the Algerians hard not to let anybody off the plane because we wanted to interview a passenger. Despite our urging, they just let everybody off and everyone disappeared into the fields including Mughniyah. So we didn't get him. My guess is that the Iranians, who had close relations with the Algerians then, also knew Mughniyah was on the plane and made, shall we say a more persuasive case to the Algerians than we did. We lost a good opportunity. To spin the clock forward, he was assassinated just last year. I suspect the Israelis got him. He was a very, very dangerous man; probably the world's most dangerous terrorist until bin Laden appeared.

On another occasion we had intelligence that a Palestinian terrorist, whose name I can't remember, was making regular use of Greece as a place to recuperate and plan new attacks in other countries. As we discussed before, some of the Europeans -- the Italians and Greeks in particular -- were letting Palestinian terrorists operate pretty much freely on their territory with the unspoken -- or maybe spoken -- agreement that the terrorists wouldn't conduct attacks on their territory.

We had intelligence that this terrorist was traveling on a false Yugoslav passport and was going to transit through Athens the next day. Through our liaison between the Agency and Greek intelligence, we tipped the Greeks off but only in general terms: "There's a guy coming through tomorrow and we understand he's on a false passport. You ought to take a close look at him."

The Greeks arrested him because he did have a false passport. Apparently at least the Greek security services didn't know he was a Palestinian terrorist. So he was held in custody. There followed a very dramatic five day Greek drama. I happened to be on a trip in Europe. I got a message from my colleagues on the Counterterrorism working group asking me to fly to Athens immediately to see if we could get the Greeks to hand this terrorist over to us. That same night, Washington sent a team of federal marshals on a C-130, to the military base outside of Athens with the intention that we would persuade the Greeks to turn this guy over to us and we'd take him away. We had an arrest warrant for him.

I met with the Greek minister of interior the day I arrived in Athens and I made a big mistake; I asked for an embassy note taker to accompany me to the meeting. The note taker was not the problem. He was a good guy. The problem was when I asked for a note taker, the minister of interior decided he would have to have a note taker too. It became clear in the course of our conversation that the minister of interior would have been delighted to turn this terrorist over to us. We had a plane ready to go. In less than half an hour we'd get him out of the country and would deal with bringing him to justice in the US. The minister clearly would have done that except that now, since he had his chief of staff there, he was politically a bit constrained in being able to say, "Go ahead and do it." If I had met him one on one, we probably would have resolved the matter then and there.

So then we had to consider filing a formal extradition request for the terrorist. There was a 1933 extradition treaty between Greece and the United States which required that we provide evidence of the crime or at least our accusation of the crime to the Greek government within three days. There followed a very desperate back and forth that entire night with the Department of Justice back here to get the relevant documents over, get them under a seal and all the stuff they had to do because of the fast approaching treaty deadline.

I met the next morning with the minister of justice, a man with a wonderful name, Agamemnon Koutsogiorgas. He did not speak English so the acting foreign minister was there as an interpreter. With me was our Ambassador, one of the FBI agents and an embassy political officer who spoke Greek.

We had one of the most violent and entertaining meetings I ever had in the Foreign Service. It quickly became clear that I was the only person in the room who had actually read the extradition treaty which I had done the night before and understood the terms of it. I could show that we were complying with the terms of the treaty. As I went though how our request met the terms, Koutsogiorgas got more and more and more excited. I said that I wanted him to understand from the American government point of view, lack of cooperation on this would have an impact on our overall relations, which was with my guidance from Secretary Shultz.

When I said that, two things happened; first, I thought our ambassador was going to need some smelling salts because he was shocked. The acting minister of foreign affairs, interpreting for the minister, instead of just interpreting what I said was saying, I learned

from the note taker, was saying "he's provoking. He is trying to provoke you. It's an outrage." etc. Needless to say this simply made the minister increasingly emotional and excited. Red in the face, he stood up and started shouting and waving his arms, saying what we were asking was inconsistent with the Greek constitution. Didn't we realize that whatever may have been agreed to decades ago and what we were asking was inconsistent with that sacred document? Article 14 "which has the blood of the martyrs, thousands of Greek martyrs on it" said that what were asking was absolutely impossible. He dashed behind his desk, pulled open a drawer, snatched a copy of the constitution and waved it in the air repeating ever more loudly that the blood of the martyrs was on this constitution. It was impossible for him to give us three days to present the extradition request; absolutely out of the question. The blood of the martyrs was invoked again.

So the meeting broke up in considerable confusion and emotion, but as the others all filed out of the room, the Greek minister pulled me aside and whispered, "I'll give you three days." So much for the blood of the martyrs.

But then the situation got still more complicated. That was a Wednesday so we until Friday to get our request before the minister. I learned that our ambassador had a previously-scheduled meeting Thursday night with Andreas Papandreou, the prime minister. A man not very friendly to the United States, to put it mildly. His government had clearly been looking the other way toward terrorism, including their own Greek terrorists.

I suggested to our Ambassador that he take me along to the meeting with the prime minister. This is a serious matter; they had a terrorist who was wanted for crimes, the murder of an American and this was important. The ambassador, still somewhat shaken by the meeting with the Justice Minister, resisted strongly the idea of bringing me along to his meeting. So I moved to Plan B. The president that day was on his way to Europe for a summit meeting. So after the Ambassador turned me down, I got on the secure phone at the Embassy and tracked down Colin Powell, the national security adviser who was on Air Force One with the president flying to Europe. I explained to Colin the problem we were having with the Greeks –and with the Embassy -- and suggested it would be helpful to the President's counter terrorism policy if the President could send a message to the Prime Minister about it, with instructions that the Ambassador was to deliver this message to the Prime Minister in his meeting that evening. I dictated a two paragraph message over the phone and a 'flash' message arrived for the ambassador two hours later with the message from the president to the prime minister instructing the Ambassador to deliver this message to the prime minister "tonight".

It was I admit a rather rough approach. The message was delivered, and although the PM still refused to hand the guy over to us, the Greeks did not release the terrorist, as our intelligence suggested they were prepared to do. They eventually took him to court and locked him up for more than a decade.

A colleague working at the embassy at that time later told me that during these fraught days -- that Wednesday and Thursday -- the European bureau at State was sending

messages to the Ambassador telling him to ignore what I was trying to do. So there is an example about how the State Department's reaction was often not in tune with the president's.

Q: This not being very helpful goes back. I was in Athens during the Colonels' period and we had a fouled up PLO attack – they thought they were hitting an El Al, but they were hitting a TWA plane at the airport. They killed several Americans, including a young American girl. These were the Greek Colonels, the really tough Colonels. Some PLO types grabbed a Greek tanker or something like that. Next thing you know, they were let go. Ambivalence isn't even a nice term for it. A cowardly approach to these things.

BREMER: At this time, Greece was the only European country that had had no success against its own home grown terrorists -- the November 15 group which had killed our station chief in 1975 and then killed a number of Greeks and others. Through all these years, the Greek government had not made a single arrest. We could not tell if the problem was incompetence or looking the other way. There were always rumors, and sometimes intelligence, that suggested there was some cooperation between the PASOK party and November 15. We just didn't know.

As for Palestinian terrorists, the Greeks were at a minimum looking the other way. This incident that I described also did not bring out the best of the State Department.

Q: It is remarkable too that they actually kept him in jail.

BREMER: The story didn't have a totally happy ending because they didn't keep the terrorist for his full sentence. I think he was sentenced to 20 or 25 years but after 10 or 12 years they let him out. He was by then no longer as effective as he used to be and at least it was better than having him slip in and out of Greece.

The affairs sent two messages: to the Greek government that we were watching what they were doing; and to the Palestinian terrorists groups which were using Greece as a benign country for R&R and planning that we were watching them closely too and would act against them.

Q: Going back to the bureaucracy and being told, you know, having the assistant secretary sending out something, looking back on this in your later years, you are young, you are a hard charger, you have the reputation for getting what you want and do you think this was also a factor? You know, being within the Foreign Service and all that?

BREMER: Sure. The Foreign Service culture is a culture of diplomacy, it's a culture of looking for overlapping interests and that's understandable. There are times in foreign policy when you have to be ready to show the stick as well as the carrot. So I wasn't running a popularity contest; I was doing what I understood the secretary and the president wanted me to do.

Q: I found as a consular officer the extreme reluctance of going to the ambassador and saying, "Mr. Ambassador, they've got a guy in jail who's an American, he shouldn't be in jail, get him out." Well, we've got a treaty, we've got that. Usually the guy is somebody who has gotten himself into trouble but there is this reluctance.

BREMER: Last night I met with the junior officer class which is just finishing its third year in the service. We were talking about the culture. 'Clientitis' is one of the real professional deformations that diplomats have to watch out for. You do need to understand the country you are assigned to, you do need to be an effective interpreter of that country to the American government. But there is a line you can't cross, where you start to say, "I am not going to carry out this instruction or do what is not right from the American point of view because it may upset the apple cart." Effective diplomats have to be ready to upset the apple cart.

One of the problems for diplomats is an inability to see when negotiations have failed and should be stopped. Henry Kissinger, when I was his chief of staff, used to say, "A Foreign Service officer will never stop a negotiation. Somebody else has to tell him to stop. They will never come back and say, "It's over." I think that is unfortunate but basically true. Diplomats ought to be able to say to their political bosses, "This negotiation track is at an end. We've got to try something else."

Q: Did you run across any other problems of trying on the international side, say what were we doing in Peru with the Shining Path?

BREMER: The problem we had in Peru and Columbia was not the same as we had in either Europe or the Middle East. The governments of Peru and Columbia, which were the two main ones at that time, clearly understood they had a real problem. These terrorists were killing their citizens. The problem in those two countries was largely a problem of competence. They needed better intelligence; they needed training, both paramilitary and just plain old police and courtroom type training. It wasn't that you had to persuade them that they had a problem; they understood they had a problem.

In Peru we had intelligence reports that suggested that they conducted their interrogations on captured terrorists in a helicopter, about 500 feet over the beaches west of Lima. If you were the guy being interrogated, you better give a pretty good answer or you might find yourself out of the helicopter without a parachute. One of the problems we had with those guys was trying to introduce the concept of the rule of law as well as being tough on terrorists.

Q: In training, did you get involved at all with I guess, mainly the army, the Delta Force, the idea of having a well-trained small group to take down a bunch of hijackers?

BREMER: Yes. By then our Delta Force had been in existence for five or six years. It was then still a top secret operation whose existence was sometimes reported in the press but not commented on by the U.S. government. We did not discuss the Delta Force in

public or with other countries, with the exception of the British. I visited Delta at Fort Bragg, saw their exercises and operations; a very impressive, brave and dedicated group of young men.

We did deploy them a couple of times on operations while I was in S/CT.

Q: I would think, OK, you've got this Delta Force or whatever the equivalent is, a group of highly specialized people but military are military. They are told to do something, they go at it in the most efficient way possible. Was there a tie to them of somebody like a political adviser saying, "You know, if you do this, you don't want to shoot those guys." I mean, I am thinking of Ollie North and the Sigonella business where you ended up with the Delta Force around a plane.

BREMER: The deployment concept was that a member of the S/CT staff would be in effect the political advisor, or POLAD, to the force. In practice, he was the leader of the team. He didn't command the force, obviously, because he was a civilian. But the concept of operation which we exercised quite regularly was that somebody from our office would, lead the team. Then, in coordination with the local American embassy, our person worked the coordination with the host country police, army, whatever it was. During my time there, we never got them on the ground in time for an actual operation. We had them on the ground a couple of times but never got into operation. So at least in my time it was never proven whether this was the right concept.

I should mention one other operation, one of the better ones we ran. The Agency had identified a Shia terrorist, Fawaz Younis, a member of Hezbollah who worked for Mughniyah. Younis was based in Lebanon. He had been involved in some of the hostage taking and attacks in which Americans were killed. We had an arrest warrant for him.

Although he was down the ladder in the organization, the intelligence suggested he might be useful as a source of information. The intelligence also suggested he was interested in drinking and chasing women. We thought we had a chance to maybe nab him.
After a lot of planning in the Counterterrorism Working Group, the interagency coordinating group, we developed a complicated operation to lure him to Cyprus. In Cyprus he was introduced to a "high liver" who said he had a great party with girls and drugs and booze and a big yacht he had rented. Why didn't Younis come out to the yacht where there would be lots of fun to be had?

We positioned this yacht just beyond the territorial waters of Cyprus, in international waters. Mr. Younis was taken out there by his cigar-smoking friend. As they approached the yacht, Younis could hear music and see girls in bikinis dancing on deck. He got on the boat, was immediately thrown to the ground, handcuffed and told he was under arrest. The men and women on the yacht were all FBI agents.

Then we had to get him back to the United States without landing on somebody else's territory where a government might argue that he should stay in that territory. We needed a procedure to bring him back to the US without risking putting the plane down in Spain

or any other country. So we positioned elements of the Sixth Fleet, including an aircraft carrier just over the horizon from the yacht. Younis was ferried on the yacht and put onboard the aircraft carrier. The terrorist was immediately transferred to a carrier-based plane which took off. It was refueled at least once over the Atlantic and flown nonstop to Dover air force base. At that time this was the longest carrier-on-deck flight in American history.

A great operation; he was arrested. Younis provided some actionable intelligence and he went to jail. It was a classic operation, rather elaborate and obviously quite expensive. But the operation sent a message to the other terrorists: there was danger afoot and we had them penetrated. Our objective with these terrorist groups was to try to create a climate of fear and mistrust among them. If they get to a point where they don't trust each other, you have already accomplished something very useful. This is essentially what happened to Abu Nidal after he was expelled from Syria to Libya in 1986. He never recovered and could no longer run his organization.

Q: It wouldn't have been a new operation with Israel but was there sort of an ongoing set of target assignments or something?

BREMER: I don't know. We didn't discuss ongoing operations with the Israelis. They could speak for themselves.

Q: How did you find the Israelis? Because obviously, you were working with the same territory? How did you find that?

BREMER: They were very good. Their intelligence was very good. Obviously, you didn't have to persuade the Israelis there was a terrorism problem. They were being killed regularly by the terrorists. They had, as we did, great frustrations with some of the Europeans not paying as much attention should to Palestinian activities in Europe as both of us thought. They were very helpful. We had very close and useful relations with them.

Q: Was anybody finding out at this time what was going on in Saudi Arabia and all, in the madrassas, in the religious schools that, they weren't teaching terrorism but they were teaching a pretty conservative form of Wahhabism.

BREMER: At this point the intelligence community and the policy community had not yet really caught on to the fact that we were facing a new kind of terrorism. I think that really only became apparent in the early 1990s. When I was chairman on the National Commission on Terrorism we reviewed 30 years worth of events and we concluded that it was only the early '90s that that became clearer.

Now it's possible there may have been analysts somewhere in the bowels of the bureaucracy in the late '80s who were onto the changing face of terrorism. If so, I never heard from them while I was in office.

Q: I asked the question because it is pretty obvious that we weren't paying much attention. I mean, nobody was.

BREMER: I think that's right.

Q: The Saudis had made sort of a deal with the religious people, we won't bother you if you don't bother us.

BREMER: And of course at that time we were working with the Saudis to encourage the Afghan mujahideen to expel the Russians from Afghanistan. This was not part of my policy watch. That was being done by other people.

But to answer your question among the counterterrorist community, this was not a big issue at that point.

Q: What were we getting during your time and what do we know about what was going on in Iran?

BREMER: The intelligence varied. Most of what we could learn about Iranian support for terrorism came from intelligence about Hezbollah's activities, which were largely but not exclusively in Lebanon. Hezbollah was conducting attacks against Israeli targets in Argentina, for example, and against Jewish targets in France. The Iranian intelligence services had assassinated a number of Iranian exiles in France and Switzerland. There was one killed here in Bethesda, So we would get glimpses of Iranian terrorist operations.

It is important to remember that Iran had been designated under American law as a state sponsor of terrorism as early as 1979, by both the Carter and Reagan administrations and has been so designated by every president of both parties since then to this day. So there is no doubt we had enough intelligence about Iranian sponsorship of terrorism to consider Iran then -- as I consider it today -- to be the biggest state sponsor of terrorism. Most of Iran's terrorism in the late 1980s was through Hezbollah. Hamas didn't exist or at least Iran hadn't started a relationship with Hamas.

Q: Did the Soviet Union, this was of course before the breakup of the Soviet Union and all, and they began to have their own terrorist problem. Did they play any role?

BREMER: Well, that's an interesting dimension. The short answer is that they were not helpful. There was intelligence -- and subsequently confirmed some of the files opened in some of the Central European countries after the fall of the Soviet Union -- that Soviets and their Warsaw Pact allies had been involved in supporting terrorism of two kinds. One: the Marxist-Leninist European homegrown terrorist groups; and second that they were giving support, usually according to our intelligence through one of their closer Warsaw Pact allies like the Bulgarians, to some of the Palestinian terrorist groups, the PFLP,DFLP and others. These too were avowed Marxist Leninist groups.

I don't remember any efforts that we made to get coordination with the Russians or the other Central Europeans on the matter. In those days before the Soviet Union collapsed we didn't have much intelligence cooperation on terrorism or much else. They were correctly viewed as hostile.

Q: I was just wondering with the Soviets, because we are talking about the Soviets in those days, if anybody was going and saying, this really isn't in your interest either. We want an orderly world.

BREMER: If those kinds of conversations were taking place, I was not aware of them. Look at the fight against terrorism in a couple of phases: the phase from '68 to say the middle of the '80s when we had to do an annual report to Congress on terrorism in which we listed the terrorist groups. When you went through and looked at '85, '86, '87 lists more than 85% of terrorist groups listed all over the world were Marxist Leninist. Did that mean the Russians were behind all of these groups? No.

Q: You should say the Soviets.

BREMER: It didn't mean the Soviets were behind all of these declared Marxist groups. But it also didn't mean they weren't supportive of a number of these groups.

Q: You launch something and it is a little hard to disavow if these people get way off the reservation.

BREMER: The Soviet intelligence services were pretty good as we found to our own regret all those years of the Cold War. If they were involved in these groups, they would certainly take care to hide their hand, usually through one of the intelligence services of their more compliant allies.

Q: The East Germans?

BREMER: Particularly the East Germans and the Bulgarians.

Q: Is there anything more we should talk about on this?

BREMER: We might want to conclude on Pan Am 103 which happened on December 22, 1988.the very end of my time at the State Department

It was a Wednesday and we had initial reports mid-day our time about the crash of an American plane somewhere in Great Britain. We didn't know what had caused the crash of this plane which had taken off from London. By the evening of that day, the British with whom we had a very good cooperation on terrorism had been on the telephone to me saying they thought this looked like a terrorist attack. The event dominated the evening news here. Very big visuals of the fire caused by the crash of the plane in Scotland.

The next day I did 20 or 30 interviews with television and the press in which, because our intelligence wasn't yet very clear, I was ambiguous as to whether this was a terrorist attack. We just didn't know. It began to look that way. There was talk for example there had been high winds over the Atlantic that night. Had the plane maybe come apart or something in the high winds?

By Friday however the British had concluded this was a terrorist attack. There was no other way to explain how the plane had gone down. Within a week we had proof that it had been a terrorist attack.

We didn't have any idea who had done it although there was one interesting trail. You may remember that during the Iran-Iraq War, in the spring of '88 an American ship on patrol in the Straits of Hormuz had accidentally shot down an Iranian Airbus with several hundred Iranian civilians aboard. We had reliable intelligence that only became relevant after Pan Am 103 that the Iranians had subsequently contacted Abu Nidal, -- who at that time, remember, was in Libya after we had him expelled from Syria -- and offered him ten million dollars, to retaliate against the Americans.

Meanwhile, the British police began a huge search over something like 200 square miles over which the debris was scattered. An absolutely amazing job done by the Scottish police led to finding the remains of the detonator-about the size of your little fingernail. Eventually we and the British were able to determine that the detonator had come from a specific make of radio, and then where the radio had been bought, and what suitcase it had been in. Really, a remarkable job of police work.

Most of the evidence came out after I left office, in February 1989. But it clearly led to Libyan officials in Malta who were subsequently named publicly.

I believe the Iranians were behind Pan Am 103. I think what happened was that Abu Nidal, having had his organization essentially taken apart by being expelled from Syria, was unable to meet his contract and his contract from the Iranians was assumed by the Libyans instead. Libya gets the blame and has paid large indemnities.

Q: I always thought that this was in retaliation for the bombing of Libya.

BREMER: No, I don't think so. That's the convenient story but I don't believe it. I believe that Qadhafi was operating on an Iranian contract. In any case, it was a devastating attack.

Q: You left in '89?

BREMER: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about two things; one, the growth in terrorism and two, our governmental response?

BREMER: I thought, in retrospect, we had moved the ball forward a bit on international cooperation and, indeed the international reaction to Pan Am 103 was pretty dramatic. A lot of governments realized they were up against something really dangerous with people putting bombs on airplanes.

In terms of the growth of terrorism, while we made some modest progress, we still had a really big problem. There were clearly people who were quite willing to kill innocent civilians by the hundreds as Pan Am 103 showed. So were we a lot further along than we had been in 1983 when they killed hundreds in Beirut? Probably not. We had at least stopped the hostage taking. So I would say it was an "on the one hand, on the other hand" balance sheet.

In terms of the bureaucratics of the American government, I was concerned because the incoming team for the new Bush administration had made it pretty clear, both privately and publicly, that they were going to downgrade attention to terrorism. In particular, they did not intend to appoint an ambassador at large for counterterrorism. The title wasn't what was important; what was important was the question of how seriously the secretary of state was going to take this issue. I think I am still to date the only person who ever was ambassador at large for counterterrorism. The job was subsequently downgraded to something called 'coordinator'.

Q: Obviously the problem hadn't gone away. Was the feeling that if we don't do this it will go away, if you ignore it? What was the feeling?

BREMER: You would have to ask the people from the first Bush administration. My impression was the incoming team felt that the Reagan administration and Secretary Shultz had put too much attention to this problem; that they took a more classic way of looking at the problems of the Middle East and intended to address those in a more classic way state-to-state fashion.

I disagreed with that. The incoming administration wanted to downgrade the office by moving it somewhere else, under the deputy secretary or the under the undersecretary for political affairs -- effectively push the responsibility for counter terrorism back in the bureaucracy, where it had been for so many years. I alerted them that Dante Fascell -- Dante Fascell, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee -- cared a lot about terrorism and had been instrumental in passing the legislation creating the Ambassador at Large position. I understand that when Fascell got wind of the plans to downgrade the post he warned them off. So the post stayed in the secretary's office but was henceforth designated "coordinator". Words matter in any bureaucracy, and this was a signal to the State Department and other governments that counter terrorism was no longer a top priority of the American government.

My successors faced the same battles that I went through inside the State Department but without the "top cover" I had had.

Q: Today is March 3, 2009. You finished your terrorism thing. How did you feel about the terrorist situation when you left? You left when?

BREMER: I left the job in February or March of 1989. I had already decided to retire.

I thought that President Reagan had laid out the right strategy on counterterrorism following the bombing of the Marine barracks in 1983 and the embassy in Beirut. Then, in a way, he had gone against that policy, that tough policy, the policy I believed was right. Don't negotiate with terrorists. You basically have to understand that they are motivated by hatred that can't be negotiated. There's no deal you can make with terrorists.

We already covered at length the problems caused by the Iran Contra affair and how it hurt the credibility of our approach to countering terrorism. By the time I left I thought we had the right policy in what we said. We had abandoned that policy in '85, '86 but we were getting back on track again.

Q: So you decided to retire. What happened?

BREMER: The new undersecretary for management, Ivan Selin, came down to my office and asked me to become director general of the Foreign Service. I told him two things: first of all, I know absolutely nothing about the personnel system. I have spent 23 years in the State Department without ever talking to personnel people. He said "that's exactly why I want you to take over the system because I think it needs a fresh look." I told him I had decided to leave the Foreign Service in June so I couldn't take the job.

Then he asked me to use the remaining time before I left to head up a taskforce to study and make recommendations to him on the Foreign Service personnel system. I agreed.

The taskforce was made up of Foreign Service officers from abroad and in Washington looking at the Foreign Service personnel system. We were specifically focused on that; we did not look at the civil service system and we didn't look at the overall personnel system, just the Foreign Service system. That was a group of eight or ten of us for about three months.

Q: What did you see when you were looking at this?

BREMER: Our conclusion was that the Foreign Service did a lousy job of managing itself and managing its personnel system. One of the key reasons for the existence of a Foreign Service to gain understanding for the American government about foreign nations, their interests, objectives in relation to America's; analyzing and reporting these analyses and recommendations to the United States government and the American people. I think we talked earlier, in one of my earlier incarnations as special assistant to Secretary Rogers I was shocked one day when president Nixon gave instructions for the Foreign Service to be abolished, just from one day to the next. Which raises the question,

why is there a Foreign Service? We've got a Foreign Agriculture Service, we've got a Foreign Commercial Service, we've got DEA, FBI, and just about everybody is overseas.

So what is the special responsibility and attribute of the Foreign Service? Basically, it's got to be the best, the most knowledgeable group of people about foreign countries. That skill allows the Foreign Service to interpret and analyze for Washington what's going on in a particular country, whether it's France or Guinea Bissau and promotes a better capability to negotiate and advance American interests vis-a-vis that country. Those skills in turn mean that a fundamental requirement for the Foreign Service is good language skills. You can't truly understand a foreign country, its culture, history and people without language.

One of the shocking things we learned in our study was that the Foreign Service did not take the need for language skills as seriously as it claimed. Each regional bureau in State specifies "language designated posts" in embassies. These are posts which the region bureau decides must be encumbered by an FSO with minimum language skills -- usually defined as a "3/3" on the 5 point scale established by the Foreign Service Institute. So for example the European Bureau might decide that the political counselor in France should speak French at a 3/3 level or above. The economic counselor in Jeddah should speak Arabic at a 3/3 level and so forth.

You would think that the Foreign Service would pay enough attention to enforce these rules. And it didn't. We found that fewer than 25% of the language designated posts throughout the world were then occupied by people who met the language designation specified by the Foreign Service itself. This requirement is not imposed by somebody outside; this is the Foreign Service managing itself and managing itself badly on what we took to be an essential differentiator for the Foreign Service. That was conclusion number one.

A related finding concerned the broader problem of the lack of emphasis on training in the Foreign Service. We looked at how the navy, the air force and the army handled training. We found that virtually, and I think it is true still today -- it was certainly my experience in Iraq -- virtually every general officer in the U.S. military has had advanced training in a field that is not directly related to his military skills. He's got an MA in international relations or in economics or something. To get to be a general officer, you had to have training, usually at least a year out of the service. The Foreign Service was then and I suspect still is, terrible in ensuring any kind of training for its members. So part of the problem was people wouldn't take the language training; but the broader problem was they wouldn't do any training. That was our conclusion.

Finally we found that the Foreign Service did a lousy job of enforcing its own "up or out" promotion policy. The promotion boards are supposed to identify the lowest %, usually the lowest 5 % in every class. Those officers should be selected out. That concerns the annual promotion evaluations. In addition there were then two thresholds; the threshold for initial commissioning of a junior officer after a certain number of years.

Q: A probation period.

BREMER: A probation period and commissioning-in formally as an officer, and then what was called and still may be the "senior threshold promotion" into the senior Foreign Service.

So we looked at all three of these promotion points: the commissioning-in, the annual promotions and the senior threshold. We found the Foreign Service did a lousy job of selecting out. Foreign Service officers write efficiency reports so this meant that even using our own Foreign Service assessment system, we were not enforcing the rules which we ourselves established. These are not problems the Foreign Service could blame on the Agriculture Department or Congress or somebody else. These are problems of the Foreign Service mismanaging itself, not holding itself to the high standard which it set for itself and which are essential, we thought, to an effective service.

So those were our main conclusions.

What happened? The answer is nothing. Nothing ever happens with these reports. We made the report, we got a fair amount of interest from the Foreign Service initially. But I suspect that most Foreign Service officers calculated that this too would pass. Our team had reviewed all of the other reports that had been written on the Foreign Service, going back 40 years, and found that none of them had made any impact either. It was a rather frustrating way to leave the Foreign Service.

Q: Let's talk about leaving the Foreign Service. You left in '89. What does one do when you've been around? Did you find something to do and what were you looking at?

BREMER: Actually I had concluded at Christmastime in 1987 that after the election a year later, in 1988, it was unlikely I'd find a good job in the new administration, even if the Republicans won the election. Francie wife said, "You are crazy. You identified with the Republicans. Why won't you have a job?" I said, "It isn't going to happen."

Q: Why?

BREMER: I didn't want to go overseas again as an ambassador. I had done that. I wanted to stay in Washington but if I looked around in Washington it didn't look to me that there would be much available whatever happened in the '88 elections. So I started looking around outside the government in early 1988. Since I have a master's in business administration, the logical thing was to think about going into business. I looked also at non-profits. I spent a year talking to a lot of people in various industries, non-profits, think tanks and so on.

In the summer of 1988, I went to New York to seek advice from my friend, Henry Kissinger. He said he really didn't have specific ideas for me but to stay in touch.

Six months later the new administration brought Larry Eagleburger back as deputy secretary of state and President Bush brought Brent Scowcroft back to be national security adviser. Larry and Brent had both been at Kissinger Associates. Henry contacted me, we had a talk and I agreed to go work for him. So ironically I had spent a year looking all over the place and wound up in the place that in retrospect seemed logical.

Q: How long had Kissinger Associates been in existence?

BREMER: It was established during the Carter administration, the late '70s.

Q: When you went in there in '89, what was it up to? What was it doing?

BREMER: Kissinger Associates was a strategic consulting firm that provided senior company leaders, usually the CEO, our analysis of geopolitical events and how those events might affect company strategy. A company might come to us and say, "I am concerned about the situation in Indonesia or Nigeria or Brazil because we have big investments there or we are considering a big investment. Can you give me some sense of what the situation looks like to you?"

So we would sit and give the CEO and his top advisers our analysis of the situation and likely developments in Indonesia or Nigeria or Brazil. Sometimes it would be a question of a company saying "we are going to invest 100 million dollars next year. Should we invest it in Brazil or Indonesia? Please give us a comparative risk assessment." That was the basic consulting part of the business. We also frequently assisted companies negotiate large scale investments in countries like Indonesia or Brazil. Most of our business was in what you would call non OECD countries.

Q: Because there everything was straight forward.

BREMER: Yes, pretty straight forward. If you needed to invest in the Netherlands, you pretty much just went and invested in the Netherlands.

Q: Let's say Indonesia; you haven't served in Indonesia. What do you do in an Indonesia brief? How would you get ready to advise a CEO?

BREMER: We had a small research staff here in Washington that produced papers about what is going on in Indonesia, the political situation, the economic situation, the other dynamics, which way is it going. The research team had the same access to people in the US government that anyone does and also was involved in some of the think tanks here, particularly CSIS, at the time.

Q: CSIS being?

BREMER: The Center for Strategic and International Studies; then it was still part of Georgetown University. We received a steady stream of visitors from places like Indonesia, or Brazil, or Nigeria, coming through both Washington and New York to meet

with members of the firm. And Dr. Kissinger and others of us regularly traveled abroad to get first hand impressions about what was going on.

So we had a lot of resources. In some countries, we had paid analysts on the ground, native Filipinos or Japanese who would provide us regular reports on the local political and economic situation. This helped us understand better the local situation in those countries. So we had a variety of ways to draw information.

Q: Did you find that the associates make an effort when various high people, particularly from outside the European and OECD appeal came to Washington to arrange to meet with them?

BREMER: Yes. A lot of these people would ask to see Dr. Kissinger when they came through, usually in New York, because he has a very wide range of contacts. Sometimes we would hear of someone coming and make an effort to see them.

As a matter of a policy established in the 1970s, Kissinger Associates did no lobbying of the American government. Every one of our contracts specifically stated that we would not lobby the U.S. government.

Q: What would lobbying have consisted of?

BREMER: Lobbying would have consisted of somebody coming to us and saying influence the American government to do X, Y or Z . Some consulting firms do that. We did not.

Q: So you could avoid signing the lobbying statement?

BREMER: Right, we never registered as a foreign agent. We didn't do lobbying.

Q: I was just last week interviewing Beth Jones who said she was asked fairly far up the line to be ambassador to Baghdad and then they found out she was a registered lobbyist and that cancelled the idea.

What role did Dr. Kissinger play?

BREMER: He played a very strong role in the firm. He had the wide range of contacts that was useful to us in getting our information. He had a good range of contacts from his own business activities -- serving on boards -- businessmen who could become clients. The same was true when I developed my board relationships. But Henry was really the heart of the business.

Q: From time to time, sort of on the op end page appeared articles by Dr. Kissinger. What prompted these?

BREMER: Most often he would come up with an idea or I would come up with an idea or somebody else would and we would talk about it. The articles were syndicated and he was contracted to write one every six weeks or so. What prompted him was a deadline. Then we would talk about it and I and others would help him with the drafts.

Q: Did you find in the Washington world, Washington/New York world, the two power centers, were there other organizations that paralleled yours, on the same playing field?

BREMER: Yes, sure. After Bush 41, Brent Scowcroft left government and founded a similar organization. At various times other senior people have gone into it: McLarty who left the Clinton administration, Bill Cohen who had been secretary of defense under Clinton. So there are a number of these firms around. It is not a new model.

Q: Were you representing any particular branch of the spectrum or does spectrum apply to these consulting firms? Sort of the business or political spectrum of support, work only with a certain type of government.

BREMER: We didn't have any governments as clients and we did no lobbying. That was different from most of the other consulting firms. Our practice was essentially a CEO level practice. We dealt with CEOs because it is at the CEO level where you can help inform the strategy of the company. We were a strategic not a tactical consulting firm. We were not a management consulting firm; we didn't compete with McKinsey or Booz Allen or those guys. We were bringing value to the CEO and his team thinking about international aspects of corporate strategy. That was our niche; that's not to say we were the only people doing it but that was our niche.

Q: You arrived in '89 and things sort of hit the fan in 1990, '89 too.

BREMER: The week I arrived was the crisis in Tiananmen Square. Then three or four months later was the fall of the Berlin Wall. Henry and I were in Beijing the day the Wall fell. We were staying at the Diaoyutai Guesthouse in Beijing and I remember hunching over a little portable radio listening to BBC reporting about the Wall coming down on November 9th. It was quite dramatic, particularly for the Chinese leadership.

Q: Let's talk about the sort of collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergency, the bloc moving towards the West. How did this affect your business?

BREMER: I think most of our American business clients saw it as an opportunity, which indeed it was. Though a number of them were somewhat naive as to how quickly the opportunity would be realized. I remember talking to one of our clients; this was maybe two years later, maybe in 1991. His company was getting ready to invest a couple of hundred million dollars in Russia. We had not known he was preparing to do that. So we had a discussion with him about it. He said, "Well, how long will it take for Russia to stabilize and get through this period?" I said, "Two generations." He went rather pale since he hadn't thought two generations ahead. He was thinking maybe a year or two

ahead. We are now roughly a generation and a half after that. I'll stick with my prediction.

Q: What caused you to think that?

BREMER: Although I am certainly not a Russian expert, I have read a lot of Russian history and my general view was that it was going to take a very long time for a country which had never known open government and where previous experiments in open government, particularly in the early part of the 20th century had been abruptly reversed. In fact, some of what we have seen now after Putin has come to power is very reminiscent of what happened in the 1905 to 1913 period in Russian history. My view was this kind of dramatic change in a society takes time. It is a point I have been making about Iraq in the last decade also. This kind of traumatic change takes time in countries which are undergoing dramatic revolution.

Q: How did you feel about investment, involvement with China for your colleagues?

BREMER: That was a tricky period for us because Henry has a very special relationship with the Chinese. What we said to clients in the aftermath of 1989 was you have to think long-term if you want to think about China. If you imagine yourself being in China ten years from now, say in the year 2000, you have to know two things; first, the Chinese have very long memories and, secondly, they will remember if you leave now when things are rough. They will remember if you stay even if you pull back and reduce your operations for a time. Many of our clients pulled back and reduced their operations for a while to see how things developed.

If you take a long view of China, even by 1989 it was clear that Deng Xiaoping's reforms that had begun a decade earlier, in 1978, were beginning to have a modernizing effect on the economy. I went first back to China in 1989 with Henry. I hadn't been there since 1975 and it was a breathtaking change. You could already see that the motor was running and certainly for the last 20 years, at least until this year, how the Chinese have been able to get that economy going. So you had to take a long-range view if you were an American businessman, we thought.

Q: When you were going there, obviously, Dr. Kissinger had this relationship with the Chinese, did Chinese officials come and say, "What do you think about this or that?" Was there a two way street or how did this work?

BREMER: Discussions with high Chinese officials can be quite direct. But there is also often a lot of indirection. I would say the Chinese didn't often just come right and ask "What do you think about this or that?" This is an old culture, very proud of itself and a lot of history. A lot of discussions with the Chinese are by indirection.

Q: Were you, you might say, skilled enough to understand what the indirection was?

BREMER: Henry was better at it than I was because he had been at it a lot longer. And of course neither of us have Chinese. But usually you could get a sense of where things were headed. Sometimes you could have very direct conversations. We were not, of course, representing the United States government so we were in a different situation.

Q: At that time, what was your feeling about the Chinese leadership and whither China at that time?

BREMER: In the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen nobody had much of a sense of where things were heading, including the Chinese, I think until Jiang Zemin solidified his control. Deng Xiaoping was still alive. He didn't die until '92. He was still in a rest house somewhere and still pulling invisible strings; invisible anyway to the 'long noses'. It was hard to say for the first two or three years what was going to happen.

Once the "Shanghai group" came in, Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji, there was a sense of an effort to continue the opening and you began to see investments. The terms under which investments were made changed a fair amount because in the early '90s, pretty much the only way to get in was to do a joint venture with an existing Chinese government institution. That changed toward the middle or end of the '90s when it became more useful to do a "greenfield investment" rather than going into China with a government enterprise. Although I went there dozens of times during those 12 years, I am still no expert on the country.

Q: Was there at all a feeling that China could break up into its component parts?

BREMER: No, not during that time and I don't think so now either.

Q: It's a huge country and with huge problems.

BREMER: You did get a sense of that when you traveled around. We traveled to Chengdu the capital of Szechwan province. It has a population of something like 85 million people. So it is bigger than all the countries in Europe. Lots of people bustling around doing all kinds of things and you say to yourself "What in the world could people in Beijing know about what is happening here, not just in Chengdu, but somewhere out in the countryside?". And the answer is not very much.

Q: Did you see the Communist Party which was obviously the governing machinery adjusting to changes?

BREMER: We also did consulting work in Russia in those years and I used to say to my friends, the difference between Russia and China is that in Russia all the capitalists are Communists but in China, it's the other way around. The Chinese are remarkably successful mercantile people as they have shown everywhere they have gone; in Africa and the United States and Europe -- they are exceptionally good businessmen. Whether he knew what he was doing or not, once Deng Xiaoping lifted the lid off and said it is nice to be rich, the Chinese culture reasserted itself with remarkable vigor.

Q: Did you get involved with Taiwan or did you sort of avoid it so as not to screw up things with Mainland China?

BREMER: We didn't have any business in Taiwan. We had some clients that asked us for our assessment about the political situation in Taiwan, but we had no Taiwanese clients. And as I pointed out, we had no governments as clients anywhere.

Q: Turning to when you started there and the Soviet Union became Russia, what was your initial evaluation of the Soviet Union?

BREMER: I can't remember when I first went to what became Russia. In 1989 and for a couple of years, it was still the Soviet Union. We had some business in Russia in the mid-'90s. One client had some business there and it involved my meeting with Russians in Moscow and St. Petersburg. They looked to me like criminals. They wore Nike sports suits with lots of gold and drove around in new Mercedes with people with submachine guns. I finally said to our client, "I am not going to meet with these guys in Russia anymore. I'll meet them anywhere else." So we started meeting in Switzerland. It didn't change the quality of people I was talking to but it was a good introduction of what was going on in Russia and probably still is. These were mostly ex-KGB and GRU people who went quickly into business. Asset stripping was taking place and our client was interested in a particular asset. It wasn't a place for the weak hearted.

Q: You were talking about two generations but did you see even more, did you see things progressing rather slowly because as far as moving into a gentle, efficient society?

BREMER: I met a number of times with university students when I went there. They were bright, well-educated, modern people. But the question was how much influence they really had. There was a brief period there when Gaidar was prime minister and then eventually founded his own party. They got crushed in the elections. This suggested these progressive voices were not able to dominate the political process, which is why it reminded me a little bit of the early 20th century experience in Russia.

Q: We are seeing sort of the same thing happening in Serbia where you might have had modern speaking people but when the chips are down and elections and all, you had the old prejudices came through.

How about the bloc countries; Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and all?

BREMER: On client business I visited Poland, what was then Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Uzbekistan. The East Europeans were quite different because the Russians had something of a complex; they had lost an empire. There was an understandable anger underneath the psyche of the Russians. On the contrary, the Central Europeans, as they preferred to be called rather than "East Europeans", the Poles, the Hungarians and the Czechs were delighted to be free of the Russians, at least for the foreseeable future.

The Czech minister of finance at that time was Vaclav Klaus, who is now the president. He is, of all of the Central Europeans, the most economically liberal in the European sense of the word. Lech Walesa was still the big guy in Poland. He had led the Solidarnosc movement against the Russians so he felt pretty strongly about being free. Hungarians are very entrepreneurial and you could already feel in Budapest a sense of renewal.

So we were more optimistic about Central Europe and I think rightly so.

Q: Did the Gulf War do anything or did you stay out of the Middle East?

BREMER: We didn't have much business in the Middle East. We had no Middle Eastern based clients. Of course, we talked a lot with our American clients about the situation in the Middle East because it had a potential impact on world oil prices . But it was not a place where we did business. We had one project in Dubai but it had nothing to do with the Middle East. It was an American client who had a financial dispute in Dubai.

Q: Where did you recruit your team, your researchers and all?

BREMER: They were usually people with recent master's degrees in international relations. Many of them came from local universities though not all. They usually would come for a couple of years to get it on their resume that they had worked at Kissinger Associates and they would go off to something better. I perfectly understood that.

Q: You did this through ten years?

BREMER: Twelve years.

Q: Until when?

BREMER: Until 2000.

Q: Then what happened?

BREMER: During this period I served on a number of public company boards, six or seven public company boards, which was quite interesting. In the course of that I had been talking to an old friend who I had known since the '70s who was at that time a top official at Marsh, the world's largest insurance broker. He finally persuaded me to come work for Marsh to head up their political risk brokerage business; not as a broker but basically to help Marsh expand and oversee their political risk business. Political risk insurance is basically insurance against expropriation and failure of contract within foreign countries.

When I got there in 2000, a Marsh colleague and I came up with an additional idea, to establish a specialized consulting company within Marsh to do crisis management training for CEOs and corporate boards. It was quite obvious crises were happening all

the time and companies were -- and are today -- unprepared for crisis. Yet we knew that you can learn crisis management. I persuaded the chairman of Marsh's holding company, MMC, to let me set up a company called Marsh Crisis Consulting, of which I was chairman and CEO. We then bought a boutique crisis management firm that was operating here in Ballston, Virginia, and set up offices in Washington. It was a start up to do crisis management consulting within the Marsh family of companies.

During that time I was also chairman of the bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism.

Q: Crisis management. What were the major concerns?

BREMER: Our basic thesis was crises happen to companies regularly – to every company. A crisis could be anything from the CEO going down in an airplane to him being caught in tax evasion or sexual dalliances, to a fire that takes out the headquarters, to a terrorist attack, to a hurricane -- it could be anything. It could be natural causes, it could be human causes. A crisis will happen.

We had charts to show that companies which handled crises well recover faster and companies that don't handle crises well often go out of business. Mismanaging a crisis can be an entity-destroying event. It is the company's brand, its reputation which is at risk in a crisis. That is the key risk. You can fix a warehouse that burns down but if you don't fix the brand you can find yourself in deep trouble.

One of the key examples was how in the 1990s Perrier mishandled a report that had found traces of kerosene at the water source in France. The company denied it for a long time, produced scientists who denied it. Yet the reports kept coming and in the end it turned out to be true. The kerosene was in the water the firm was selling. The company had been not telling the truth about it. Perrier sales in the United States dropped 90%. This was precisely the time Americans started drinking soda water at lunch rather than a martini. Perrier sales fell off the charts. So when you go into a store or a restaurant today, you are more often offered San Pellegrino than you are Perrier. Perrier never recovered its market share in the United States because of how it mishandled this particular crisis. San Pellegrino displaced Perrier as a name in the United States. That's one example.

Marsh Crisis consulting was able to design and most importantly to exercise a crisis management plan specifically tailored to each client's risk profile. Another principle of good crisis management is that the top business leader, usually the CEO, has to come out immediately and speak about the firm's responsibilities -- to its employees, customers and the community at large. So in the plans and exercises we designed, it was essential that our client CEO engage in the exercises. He couldn't just delegate it to someone else. This is something I had learned form the many war game exercises I had done in the Foreign Service. If you don't get the principal involved in the exercise, it doesn't do any good because when the real thing happens, if he shows up and says "now what do we do" you might as well not have had a plan. It is the first 48 hours that matters.

Q: Just to give an idea of what sort of preparation. What would you have told an exercise on how to handle something?

BREMER: There are some basic rules: number one, you got to remember the CEO is the spokesman. He can't delegate to anyone else. Another example was the case of Exxon Valdez.

Q: A tremendous oil spill in Alaska.

BREMER: The chairman of Exxon didn't get to Alaska for three days. During those three days the story was fixed in everyone's mind. Exxon was basically answering questions from some skyscraper in Texas. Rule number one, you are the spokesman; you can't delegate.

Rule number two, you have got to be honest and tell everything you can, as fast as you can. Communication involves not just communicating with the public but communicating to people. This came home in Marsh itself about the time I was ready to launch this company publicly. As we were working up our business plan, the 9/11 attacks happened. Marsh lost 295 employees in the World Trade Center North Tower. So Marsh immediately had its own crisis which involved the need to communicate with our employees what we were doing and to the 295 families. A lot of the exercises in crisis management we did were involved in trying to get both internal and external communications plans set up and exercised. We had capacity to video the exercises we ran for our clients. The company we had bought in Ballston had a very good reputation for setting up and running these exercises. That was our business.

Q: Then 9/11 happened. So what did this do to you?

BREMER: Obviously, I didn't immediately know what it was going to do. Eventually, it led to my going back into government. We did launch Marsh Crisis Consulting, and getting the business going. There was lots of bureaucratic resistance inside of Marsh to us. It reminded me a bit of government. I had thought that a big business in the private sector would be less bureaucratic than the State Department. But Marsh was only marginally less bureaucratic. When I was the ambassador at large for counterterrorism at the State Department, I was an alien body in the State Department. All of the defensive mechanisms that State has -- and any bureaucracy has -- were brought to bear on me to try to contain our office and diminish our importance. I was able to get around that only because Secretary Shultz and the President both believed strongly in what we were trying to do.

In the same way, when we set up Marsh Crisis Consulting all of the defense mechanisms came around and attacked us. I kept saying to the other March employees, "I am trying to help you." The Marsh Crisis Consulting practice was a CEO level practice, something I had built on from the Kissinger Associates. But most of the Marsh relationships were at the risk manager level. If you look at a corporate organization chart, risk managers report to treasurers or sometimes to general counsel or sometimes CFOs. So basically Marsh

was not communicating at the CEO level. The proposition Marsh leadership liked about our company was we could perhaps raise the level of Marsh's entrée to the CEO. That in turn would open the possibility to sell other Marsh McLennan products, in consulting and finance. So I felt we were trying to help them. Anyway, that's not the way many within the Marsh insurance area saw it. I remember saying to Francie that I felt sometimes when I woke up in the morning I saw these big hands coming over the edge of the bed, trying to strangle us in the crib. We had quite a bureaucratic battle within Marsh.

Q: With 9/11 did you sense a, in the first place how did you feel about, or did you have any particular feeling about the Bush II administration?

BREMER: The bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism reported to President Clinton in June of 2000 that America faced a new threat from Islamic extremists. We predicted there would be mass casualty attacks on the homeland. We made a variety of recommendations, scores of them. There was a lot of attention when we introduced our report, which ironically had a photo of the World Trade Center on the Cover. I testified in Congress, all of the members of the Commission did press conferences, made speeches. And then nothing happened. The Clinton administration did nothing even after the attack on the US Navy ship, the Cole, in Aden in October 2000. The new Bush administration had done nothing as of September, 2001, 15 months after our report. I remember, by total coincidence, the day before the attacks, on September 10, I was in Washington and I had lunch with Congresswoman Jane Harman. Jane had been on the commission. She and I were lamenting that 15 months had gone by and nothing had happened; the Clinton administration had done nothing and the new Bush administration had done nothing to take up the recommendations we had made. We agreed at lunch that day that we would try to go see the vice president and get him to do something about it. He is a classmate of mine and so I have known him a long time. Fifteen hours later, the world changed.

Q: What had sparked this feeling there could be a Pearl Harbor type of attack on your commission?

BREMER: Our commission studied the evidence. The intelligence, both what was public and what was not public, showed very clearly that going back to the late '80s, -- you could go back to 1983 to the attacks on the Marine barracks in retrospect -- by the late '80s it was clear that the al-Qaeda group, particularly under bin Laden, had declared war on the West. They were very clear in their press conferences and later in their websites that they hated western civilization. A key factor was the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 was the terrorists' intention to inflict mass casualties.

Through good police work the FBI caught the six guys who had conducted the first World Trade Center attack. They were caught by tracking the rental truck used for the bomb. They confessed their intention had been to topple one tower into the other and kill 250,000 Americans. That number shocked us. They wanted to kill 250,000 people. The Commission then looked more closely at what al Qaeda was up to, including their efforts shown by our intelligence to get their hands on chemical and nuclear materials. We

concluded these people were serious and that they wanted to kill us by the hundreds of thousands. That was our conclusion.

Q: You had this attack. Did this change what you were up to?

BREMER: It accelerated the effort to get the Marsh crisis management company in place. There was a lot of concern among companies at that time about what they would do if they lost, as we had, 300 people or if they lost their data processing. A lot of companies didn't have redundant data processing -- what would they do? How could they improve their physical security procedures? So there was a lot of attention to the need for effective crisis management.

I should go back; at this time I was also serving on another body called the Gilmore Commission. This was a five year study of homeland security chaired by former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore and which, in the end, recommended the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. Meanwhile, after 9/11, the president established a Homeland Security Advisory Council which he put me on. These activities added another dimension; but after 9/11, my focus was on my own company.

Q: I would assume there is nothing like a wakeup call. This must have been, business was booming, wasn't it or not?

BREMER: It was still a hard sell. Here's the problem: most people operate on the assumption that tomorrow will be more or less like today and that there may be times when something out of the ordinary happens but they are not foreseeable. If they are not foreseeable, they are hard to quantify and if they are hard to quantify, it's hard to justify the expense. So you still have a problem, even if you can persuade a client that a crisis can happen. It is not an easy thing.

Q: I would think going back to this, losing almost 300 people from your root company, this must have been just,

BREMER: Inside Marsh it was a devastating event, yes.

Q: Was it able to put things together and all?

BREMER: Yes, I think so. It took time but the company was able to get back on its feet pretty quickly.

Q: When did Iraq come into play?

BREMER: Iraq came in early 2003.

Q: Up until that time, had you paid any attention to Iraq?

BREMER: Yes. In fact, Iraq came up in our bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism. Iraq was one of seven countries identified by the US government as a state sponsor of terrorism. Iraq had been on that list for decades.

During the '90s I had watched the successive U.N. Security Council resolutions be ignored by Iraq and the concerns which became clearer towards the end of the '90s about Iraq's possible nuclear or WMD programs. Saddam had developed and used chemical weapons in the 1980s, against the Iranians in the Iran-Iraq war and also against his own citizens, the Kurds.
Q: Did you feel the Clinton administration during the '90s was paying much attention to the recommendations of your commission?

BREMER: We didn't make our recommendations until June 2000. A conclusion of our commission was that in the '90s the Clinton administration had not paid enough attention to the evolving and dangerous problem of terrorism; we reported that its responses had been weak and inconsistent, including in Iraq. There had been a plot by the Saddam's government to kill former President Bush in Kuwait. The Clinton administration's response was to send a cruise missile into the ministry of interior in Baghdad in the middle of the night. They didn't want to kill a lot of people. They killed one guard. Well, if you decide to use force, you might as well be prepared to do something that actually has an effect.

It was the administration's weak reaction to the bombings of the American embassies in East Africa in 1998 which brought about the National Commission on Terrorism. Congressman Frank Wolf of Virginia felt the administration had essentially done nothing, which was true, and therefore he mandated the establishment of the National Commission on Terrorism.

We reported in June of 2000. In October terrorists attacked the USS Cole in Yemen and the Clinton administration did nothing. My overall impression, both before I was on the National Commission on Terrorism and during and after, was the Clinton administration had been hesitant and inconsistent in the face of a growing threat from Islamic extremists.

During the 1970s and '80s, when I was in government, we were able to think of terrorism essentially as a criminal act because terrorists were using terrorist attacks as a tactic to get attention for themselves. They didn't want to die. As we discussed, a CIA report I commissioned in 1988 showed that fewer than 2% of all of the thousands of attacks in the preceding 20 years involved suicides. After '88 the evidence seen by the National Commission showed suicides shooting up as a percent of attacks. And we noted that while the number of terrorist incidents in the 1990s was dropping, the number of casualties was increasing. So terrorism's lethality was escalating.

When you faced terrorists who didn't want to be captured, who didn't want to die, who didn't want to go to jail, approaching them as criminals and trying to increase law enforcement ways to catch them and bring them to justice made some sense.

The problem in the ‘90s and now is that these are no longer just violent criminals. These terrorists are no longer people who don’t want to go to jail or don’t want to die; they are perfectly prepared to die as we saw dramatically on 9/11. So you can no longer continue to think of them simply as criminals. The Clinton administration tended to still see them as criminals. As we talk today in 2009, I believe there is a danger of our government slipping back into that way of thinking. We have been fortunate not to have had an attack on the American homeland for almost eight years. There is a danger of slipping back to thinking of them as criminals and making the goal of counter terrorism to prosecute people. That would be a mistake. The problem is much bigger than that. These Islamic terrorists, intent on mass casualty pose a strategic threat especially to our friends in the Middle East.

Q: During this time was al-Qaeda sort of first and foremost?

BREMER: When the National Commission made our report in 2000 al-Qaeda was very much at the center of our thinking.

Q: Today is May 12, 2009. We are coming to the point regarding your Iraq experience. I’ve read your book and found it very interesting. Let’s talk about some aspects of it, you know, as you had a chance to mull over and get other people’s opinion.

In the first place, how did you get into this thing?

BREMER: After I left the State Department in 1989, for the next 14 years I was a businessman, but I kept a hand in international relations, both through my work at Kissinger Associates, a company that provided political risk analysis and from my continued interest on counterterrorism. During the 1990s I was frequently called upon by think tanks and by the press to comment or write about the threat of terrorism.

Q: You mentioned before when you had the terrorism portfolio, it had been under the secretary and then it had been sort of demoted after you left. It showed diminished interest.

BREMER: Yes. I think it is fair to say that both in the first Bush administration and in the Clinton administration, dealing with terrorism had fallen back to more or less where it was in the ‘70s and early ‘80s which is to say, less attention paid to it by those administrations and less attention at the State Department. Although the position was still formally in law labeled “ambassador at large for counterterrorism”, starting in the first Bush administration in 1989 the position was downgraded. It took up its old name of coordinator for counterterrorism. Successive secretaries of state and the two presidents paid less attention to it.

After the 1998 attacks on the American embassies, the National Commission on Terrorism was established and Newt Gingrich asked me if I serve as the chairman. The Commission met from 1999 to the middle of 2000 as a bipartisan commission, a ten member commission; five appointed by the Republicans, five by the Democrats.

Q: Was there any sort of partisan feeling? On terrorism, was this given Republicans and Democrats but did that make any difference?

BREMER: In the end it didn't. I told the other commissioners at our first meeting that my objective was to get a report with no dissents but also I didn't want the report to be pabulum. The usual way of these commissions get no dissents is by having everybody agree to do nothing. I appointed as my vice chairman a Democrat, Maurice Sonnenberg, a politically active businessman from New York whom I had known. I particularly counted on him to help deliver the Democrats.

We decided at the outset that we would follow the facts where they led us. We agreed to get the facts on the table by talking to all of the people in the U.S. government; the intelligence services and our allies and to knowledgeable researchers and academics, here and abroad. We all agreed that we would go wherever the evidence led us.

As the facts were laid out for us by numerous US government officials, including the most sensitive intelligence we had at the time, it became clear to all of us that we had a major new terrorist threat on our hands ,one that was very different from those we had faced in '70s and '80s. That was the burden of the report.

Q: Let's discuss this.

BREMER: We have discussed this earlier. Terrorism has been around for centuries. The modern phase of terrorism started in 1968 when, as a result of Israel's decisive victory in the 1967 war, radical elements of the Palestinian movement concluded that they could not defeat Israel by conventional means. So they resorted to terrorism. This started the radicalization of various elements of the Palestinian movement; the PLO, the PFLP, the PFLP-GC -- a whole alphabet soup of them. The attacks included hijacking of planes in Jordan in 1970, the very dramatic killing of the Israeli athletes in Munich in 1972, the kidnapping and assassination of the American ambassador and his political counselor in Sudan in 1973. That was a PLO operation directed by Yasser Arafat.

Q: Curtis Moore and Cleo Noel.

BREMER: That attack had a pretty dramatic impact on Americans too.

At the same time -- largely as a result of the radicalization of student populations in the late '60s in Europe -- Marxist Leninist homegrown European terrorist groups like Action Directe in France, the Bader Meinhof in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, the CCC in Belgium appeared on the scene.

Q: The Red Army in Japan.

BREMER: Their objective, to the extent they articulated it, was getting America out of Europe. It was part of their Marxist Leninist leanings. These Palestinian groups were also

Marxist Leninist. From roughly 1968 until I left office in 1989 something like 90% of all terrorist groups in the world were Marxist Leninist, even the relatively minor ones like Sendero Luminoso in Peru.

When in 1999 and 2000 the National Commission on Terrorism looked into terrorism we identified four important trends. First, terrorism was becoming bloodier. The number of terrorist attacks was declining but the number of casualties was skyrocketing. Secondly, suicide attacks which had been insignificant during the ’70s and ‘80s, were increasing dramatically in the 1990s. Third, terrorists, as they had shown in the first World Trade Center attack were intent on causing mass casualties.

Finally the Commission noted that all of the states which the State Department identifies as state sponsors of terrorism were involved in developing or had developed weapons of mass destruction, including Iraq, which had developed and used chemical weapons. Libya had also used chemical weapons in Chad.

So the Commission’s concern was we now faced terrorists with the intention to kill hundreds of thousands of Americans and potentially able to get their hands on really bad stuff to conduct such attacks.

Q: Was there a shift away from Marxist Leninist to Islam?

BREMER: Yes, and therefore one had to look at the motives. Why suddenly are we faced with this? The answer was we found a radical Islamic movement. The Commission reviewed the statements, the press commentary, and toward the end of the ‘90s, the websites of these radicals, most prominently al-Qaeda. We found their motive was very clear: a fundamental abiding hatred for Western civilization. Not just the movies and the magazines but everything the Western societies are based on. They hate separation of church and state, they hate universal suffrage, they hate women’s education, they hate trade unions and free press and most of all they hate democracy. They make it absolutely clear.

So we concluded we faced a new kind of threat. It followed that dealing with these people as simple criminals, as we had done in the ‘70s and ‘80s, was no longer adequate. The evidence of the 1990s showed that these “new style terrorists” were willing to die in their attacks. Their fundamental motive was such that there was nothing to negotiate about. You can’t negotiate with people who hate the very fundamentals of your civilization.

The commission made a number of recommendations to Congress, to President Clinton and to the American people. Like most commissions, everything we recommended was essentially forgotten until September 11, a year and a half later.

Q: Why would the administration at least not give publicity of embracing the report, we’re going to do something and then hand out commissions and then do nothing?

BREMER: We were reporting in June of 2000 so we were amidst an election year. We pushed to get our report out as far away from the election as we could because we didn't want it to fall into a political problem. It was a unanimous report, by the Republicans and the Democrats.

It was critical of the Clinton administration; the report argued the government hadn't done enough -- particularly had been lax in efforts to recruit agents inside terrorist groups. We were quite critical of the CIA and the CIA director at that time, George Tenet. We were critical of what we thought was the government's weak response to the attempt to assassinate former President Bush by the Iraqis. We thought that they had not done enough to counter the growing evidence at that time that Iraq was continuing its programs in WMD.

Q: Weapons of mass destruction.

BREMER: Nothing really had been accomplished in the wake of the attacks on the American embassies in Africa.

In any case, blame does not fall only to the Clinton administration because the Bush administration also did nothing with our report until after September 11.

Q: Was there a 'Chicken Little' group running around, the sky is going to fall and all? I would think either our right wing or our left wing or somebody would have picked this up.

BREMER: I am more philosophical about it. I think basically democracy is pretty lousy at planning for a crisis. You look at America; here is a country that was, in effect, torpedoed into the First World War, which had already been going on for three years. We are dive bombed into the Second World War, which also had been going on for more than two years. It seems to take a punch in the nose to get the American democracy to focus on this kind of potentially catastrophic attack.

As an aside, I am very concerned now while we have now gone eight years without an attack in my view the present administration, the Obama administration, is sliding back into the mindset of thinking of terrorists as criminals; they're talking about bringing these guys to justice. That isn't going to be enough to defeat these Islamic extremists.

Q: Let's look a little bit at the CIA and recruiting. Can you recruit into terrorist organizations?

BREMER: Yes, and we have had some successes. But we found that in the first Clinton administration in 1993 or '94, John Deutch moved to the CIA, having been deputy secretary of defense, when Jim Woolsey resigned from CIA. There had been a case involving a colonel from Central America who had done some military training in the US. He was gathering intelligence for us. He tried to recruit people for us. It turned out the colonel himself had killed somebody. Maybe it was a human rights abuse, I don't

remember the details. As a result of which Deutch asked the CIA lawyers to come up with a much more restrictive set of guidelines for recruiting agents in terrorist groups. The fundamental thesis being we should not put people on the American payroll who might be human rights abusers. On the face of it, this is nonsense because anybody who can provide any useful information about a terrorist group is by definition going -- at a minimum -- to be closely associated with criminals, probably murderers and maybe will be a murderer himself. But if he is willing to tell us about plans that are important which may cost American lives, we should by all means put him on the payroll.

The National Commission talked to serving case officers in the field in the Middle East, we talked to station chiefs, and we talked to people in the Directorate of Operations (DO) back in Washington. The universal view was that the Deutch guidelines, as they were called, put a chilling effect on the willingness of field officers to go out and try to recruit terrorist agents.

I remember meeting a young first tour case officer attached to a station in the Middle East. I asked her about these guidelines and she said, "Well, here's the problem. You've got to remember that like every DO officer I am graded on my ability to recruit. That's the key thing. I am here for a two-year tour. I am going to be graded on how I am doing recruiting agents. If I find a potential terrorist agent, under the current guidelines first I have to persuade the deputy station chief, then the station chief, that recruiting him is worth proposing to Washington. Then a telegram goes back and at headquarters the lawyers start asking questions about the possible recruit. What's his background? Are you sure he's not a killer. These are sent to the station to be answered. It takes six months of back and forth, answering questions. So I lose six months of my two years. First of all, it took me six months to find the guy and the answer from Washington after all the Qs and As may very well may be "no, you can't recruit him." So why should I waste my time? By now, the recruit may be dead or working for some other intel agency. I will go after an easier target. I'll go after the second secretary at an embassy."

I briefed Tenet about our finding before we issued the report. He said to me, "Look, you've got this wrong. I have approved every proposal for recruiting agents that has been put to me." I told him he was missing the point. He was getting only a fraction of all the proposals that are coming in from the field. Before they got near his desk, each proposed recruitment had first to go through this bureaucratic jungle gym. So by the time a proposal reached him, after all this scrubbing and rubbing, the potential recruit may not even be alive. I told him the Agency guidelines were the most effective bureaucratic prophylactic I had seen in 30 years of service in the U.S. government.

I certainly do not downplay the difficulty of recruiting agents in terrorist groups. This is probably the most difficult target there is in intelligence. They are inherently secretive and paranoid, and often use the typical Marxist system of cells where by one guy only knew Abdul but he didn't know who Abdul worked for. And these guys are killers, so this is a hard target.

We unnecessarily hamstrung ourselves in the 1990s. My understanding is those guidelines have been modified. It is still a hard target but it was one of our main findings. Our human intelligence was not very good.

Q: Richard Clarke, did he play, a key figure at all?

BREMER: The commission interviewed him a couple of times, because at that time he was working at the NSC. He understood we were facing a new kind of threat.

We can talk about intelligence, but the real problem is a strategic concept. The commission found that the strategic framework for dealing with terrorism had changed because the motives of these terrorists was different. That was a matter you could understand just by reading what was on the public record, their statements and fatwas. You didn't need a lot of secret intelligence.

Q: The Fatwa being the?

BREMER: A religious command by an authorized Islamic mullah, usually. You can always say, we need more intelligence and certainly we do, particularly concerning possible attacks on Americans. But the fundamental problem is understanding the concept that we faced a new strategic threat. That was the burden of the National Commission Report.

The Bush administration, at least for the first nine months, didn't do any better than the Clinton administration had done since our report came out in June 2000.

Q: Was there any group, within the sort of power complex in Washington, political or something else that was supporting you, saying we've got to do something?

BREMER: There were always people like Jane Harman who was a Democrat. She had her circle of friends and colleagues in Congress. When she served on the Commission she was between congressional duties. There were some people in various think tanks, the Heritage Foundation, for example. At about the same time, Congress had funded through the Rand Corporation a five year study on homeland security under then Governor Jim Gilmore of Virginia which we discussed earlier. I served on that commission and we had quite a broad representation of first responders; fire chiefs, police chiefs from all over the country, health people looking at the broad question of homeland security. With former Attorney General Ed Meese I chaired a study group at Heritage on defending the homeland in the aftermath of 9/11. So there were groups that started before 9/11; but really it was 9/11 that mobilized most of the attention.

Q: Was there anyone in either the Clinton or the Bush NSC that was paying attention to this?

BREMER: Richard Clarke was in the Clinton administration at the NSC. You have to remember Bush II was a new administration; new administrations take six to eight

months to get themselves organized. I don't think there was anyone paying particular attention that I can remember in the first six or eight months of the Bush administration. These commissions come and go all the time in Washington and normally they have almost no impact on policy. Part of the problem is there is no sustained funding or ability for a commission once it issues its report to stay in front of the public. Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group which at the end of 2006, very prominent Republicans, very prominent Democrats. They talked to all the right people in Washington, thought they had the right policy. The president, correctly in my view, and courageously, decided to ignore their recommendations. But even they couldn't sustain attention. It is a fact of life these commissions rarely have much impact.

Q: One further question on this; as your commission was looking at this, were you able to look at Islam as such? One of the things that strikes me is you have what apparently is a rather small hunk of the Islamic community is able to sort of dominate the policy with the rest of the Islamic community not really doing anything, which in effect, supports this. Did you get a feel for Islam?

BREMER: We did. We had a lot of experts come in from the State Department, from the think tanks, the CIA, parts of the government and outside experts and professors. They talked to us about Islam and trends in Islam. Our conclusion was these extremists represented a small percent of Muslims. They misinterpreted Islam. What we were watching was what I have often called a civil war inside Islam. There is a small group of fanatic extremists and a large group that in the American context we used to call "the silent majority." In my presentations after the commission I suggested we had to do everything possible to strengthen the moderates in this civil war inside Islam, whether those moderates were in Detroit or Jakarta.

Q: Had there been much of an effort, an outreach to them?

BREMER: You could argue that's what the State Department does for a living. We have embassies in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Indonesia and one of their jobs is to reach out to them; that's fundamental diplomacy. Was there an organized, structured way? No, not until the position of undersecretary for public diplomacy, was created in the Bush II administration. There's a whole other question whether that's the right approach or whether it worked. But certainly not until 9/11 there was any such program.

Q: During the time you issued your report, what was happening in Europe? Was there, because the Europeans have got a problem too. At that time?

BREMER: Before issuing our report, the commissioners went on several foreign trips to talk to allies we were close to, the British and the French, with their intelligence services and foreign offices. We found some understanding, particularly in France, about the nature of the threat because they began to see it gathering in France. But neither we nor they had yet seen these large scale attacks on their territories. While the Europeans expressed a lot of sympathy for America after 9/11 which also killed, a lot of British,

French and Dutch citizens, it wasn't until the bomb attacks on the subway in London, the attacks on the train in Spain that it really came home to the Europeans that they were also a target. I think at the time our commission was going around, as was the case with our government, people were frankly looking the other way.

Q: In this terrorism look thing, did Iraq, was it there?

BREMER: Yes. Iraq had been labeled a state sponsor in terrorism as far back as the Carter administration. Both Bush I and Clinton had identified Iraq as a state sponsor. Iraq had been on the list for years. Saddam Hussein openly supported Palestinian terrorists. He gave 25,000 dollar grants to families of the so-called "martyrs", anybody who died conducting a terrorist attack in the "Occupied Territories". He had close connections with a lot of the Palestinian terrorist groups and he clearly had developed weapons of mass destruction. He had used chemical weapons against his own people in the Kurdish region and against the Iranians in the Iran-Iraq war. Iraq was certainly part of our broader assessment that we faced a difficult situation.

Saddam was not an Islamic extremist. He was not a believer in establishing the universal caliphate; he was a secular extremist and a Sunni. The one Islamic extremist government was in Iran and he had fought a long war against them. Iraq was one of the countries but the primary country the commission focused on was Iran.

Q: As you were looking at your report were you seeing a shift of concern in quantity, maybe from the Palestinian type secular, Marxist state as opposed to this huge mass of Islamic things?

BREMER: There's no question. That is what I had in mind when I was talking about the "old style terrorists" and the "new". These new terrorists weren't Marxist, they had a vision, and some of them like the president of Iran had an apocalyptic idea about a worldwide Islamic caliphate, very different from the Marxist Leninist Palestinian groups.

While Iran was a focus of our attention the national commission on terrorism also noted the growing Iranian connections with Hamas. Iran had been the grandfather of Hezbollah back from the early '80s. In retrospect, in some ways this new form of terrorism was first brought to our attention with the attack on the Marine barracks in 1983. It wasn't obvious at the time.

Q: A suicide bombing.

BREMER: A suicide bombing, killing over 200 Americans. It was a Hezbollah operation and that terrorist group is Iran's cat's paw. So when we looked at the terrorist states we were mostly concerned abut Iran which for 30 years has been identified as the preeminent state sponsor of terrorism. Iraq was on the list but it wasn't at the top of the list.

Q: Looking sort of how politics work in the United States and I am talking about politics in the big picture, not partisan politics, that it was hard to get Americans to look at

religious inspired terrorism because, our concern for so long, since 1948 has been on Israel, obviously Israeli and Jewish groups but others, the great concern about the safety of Israel and this other al-Qaeda type thing was sort of amorphous where it would be easier to get real concentration on Palestinian terrorism.

BREMER: I think it is broader than that. I think Americans as a general rule are not very comfortable talking about religion in relation to other countries. I say that also about the Foreign Service. I think the Foreign Service was not very comfortable talking and thinking about it.

Q: There is very little training in this but I think it was cultural.

BREMER: I think it springs from the American people and as a whole the Foreign Service reflects American society. So Foreign Service officers are not very comfortable talking about religion whether it is Judaism, Hinduism or Islam. Part of the reason our commission's very clear message about the dangers were not heard was people just didn't want have to think about religion being that important in motivating people's actions outside the United States.

In some ways we are now even more hamstrung because we have become so imprisoned in this mantra of political correctness and even diversity. We are implored to respect everybody for whatever they are. We need to say to ourselves, "Yes, but wait a minute. It's a good thing to respect diversity. It's quite another thing to start to tolerate people who are determined to destroy Western civilization." That may just be a stated goal. You can debate whether they can manage to do that or not. But they sure as hell can kill a lot of Americans and mostly other Muslims trying.

Q: And also one of the things is they are identified relatively identifiable. It can change but it is a sort of a, essentially an Arab-centric cause. Even as we talk here, you can see we are both a little bit uncomfortable about saying that.

BREMER: What I am uncomfortable with is your saying that they are relatively identifiable. You can identify what they believe because these Islamic extremists have been very clear about their objective: which is that they should establish a worldwide caliphate, that they should get rid of universal suffrage, women should not go to school, there should be no free press and no democracy. The elements are all there to hear and to see. Who they particularly are and how you get at them is harder. How you deal with that threat, particularly given the possibility that someday one of these guys may get his hands on a weapon of mass destruction, a nuclear, biological, radiological, chemical agent of some kind. Then we would be into something much more serious than 9/11.

Q: Let's talk about 9/11. Where were you and how did you react?

BREMER: As I mentioned, I had lunch with Jane Harman on Monday, the 10th of September, 2001 and we agreed that nobody was paying attention to our report. So we

were going to try to see Cheney later that week. I was working in New York and living in Washington. So I was regularly commuting between the two cities. On Tuesday morning, September 11 as usual I took the 8:30 AM shuttle from National. We got up over Philadelphia and the plane started to circle -- I flew it almost every week so I knew where we were circling. Usually over Philadelphia you circled because there was bad weather in New York. But the day was crystal clear. I turned to a woman sitting next to me said, "Strange, why should we be circling over Philadelphia?" She shrugged.

The captain came on at around 9:00 and said that he had just been informed that LaGuardia was closed because a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. I assumed some small plane had hit the building. But we circled some more and the pilot came back on and said, "It doesn't look like LaGuardia is going to be open so we are heading back to National" which also struck me as strange. Why would LaGuardia which is 12 or 15 miles from the WTC be closed because of an accident at the WTC? And why should we return to National? This was only the second flight of the day, so the plane certainly had plenty of fuel. We could have circled some more. In those days there were GE phones on the airplane and so I picked up the phone to call my secretary at Marsh in New York to tell her it looked like I was going to be delayed. I got her on the phone. Our office was midtown and she was looking downtown when I called. She confirmed that a large plane hit the Trade Center. As she was saying this, she saw the second plane go into the second tower. She said, "Oh, my God," and burst into tears.

I hung up the phone and said to the woman next to me, "This is a major terrorist attack." Then it was clear, all of the nightmares of the commission came home.

The captain then came on once more: "We are being diverted from Washington to Baltimore." We landed at Baltimore and the captain now told us that the president had declared a national emergency. So we were obviously not going anywhere. I rushed off the plane, bumped into a friend who had also been on the plane. We knew we would be in a race to get a cab and rushed out to get one to bring us back to Washington. The taxi driver had the radio on, WCBS, and, meanwhile, my cell phone was ringing from the press. We heard CBS announce the collapse of the second tower, not having realized the first tower had already gone down; that had happened while we were still on the airplane.

When we approached Washington, we couldn't get into the city because the city was closed down. We heard about the third plane hitting the Pentagon and could see the smoke. So the taxi brought me home instead of going into the Marsh office. I spent the next couple of days on the phone with my offices in New York and Washington and with the press.

Q: What were you telling, obviously you had been rather prominent in talking about this subject so you were in everybody's rolodex. What were you telling and were you getting any other information coming in or were you?

BREMER: It was pretty confused. I was saying this looked like what we had unfortunately predicted which was a major terrorist attack on the homeland. At that point,

we didn't know who had done it. I don't remember talking to anybody in the administration. They were pretty busy themselves so I don't remember getting any separate information.

Q: So there it was. What happened to you?

Two things happened; first of all, Marsh itself lost 295 of our colleagues in the attack; it was the second largest number of any company because we had many, many people whose offices were in the north tower, including the people who worked for me. By a strange coincidence I had moved the political risk team out of the north tower three weeks earlier to the midtown office where it was more convenient to have them. They grumbled and griped because it changed their commuting pattern. Several of them lived in New Jersey. The first plane went right through their window, on the 92nd floor. They only survived because of the move. Totally coincidental.

Marsh was dramatically affected by this event. The CEO Jeff Greenberg asked me to come to New York to see him on Thursday, the 13th. Of course, you couldn't fly, so I took the train up. He asked me what we should do. I told him that I had been getting ready to propose to him the Marsh Crisis Consulting company I had been designing with colleagues for months. It certainly looked as if a lot of people would need help managing the crisis, including Marsh itself.

So we launched that firm shortly thereafter and I then spent my time for the next two years getting this company up and running.

Q: Let's take your Marsh. How did they deal with that horrible problem?

BREMER: Not very well. The biggest problem facing an organization like Marsh was dealing with the anger and grief on the part of the survivors and the next of kin. The company set up a lot of programs to deal with those things but they did it on the fly, had no plan in place which was the whole point about crisis management. You have to have a plan in place, you have to exercise it. It's like a military plan or a fire drill. You exercise the plan to tell where the problems are. It takes months. Sometimes years to get over a tragedy like that. It was a very painful time.

Q: In a way, out of this I would assume that just your experience you would be working on a template, wouldn't you, for how to deal with it?

BREMER: All I had at this point was a plan to establish a crisis consulting firm. I didn't have any people, I didn't have any budget. I had some ideas but I didn't have a structure. I didn't have any way to produce people to help Marsh through its immediate problem. Marsh did eventually become a client of my company but that took another six months. On behalf of Marsh, I bought a small company in the Washington area, moved them into the Marsh DC office. The company we bought had good experience and technology because they'd been doing crisis management exercises for some years.

Q: Let's go back to the original question: how did you get into it?

BREMER: In this period when I was setting up this crisis management firm I was involved with various activities trying to analyze what we should do in the aftermath of 9/11. I mentioned before I co-chaired a Heritage study on keeping the homeland safe. I served on another commission at the National Science Foundation that looked at scientific possibilities for countering terrorism. And I was a member of the Gilmore Commission was looking at homeland security and which eventually recommended the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. The president appointed me to his Homeland Security Advisory Commission in 2002.

Q: Did you get involved in the election?

BREMER: No.

Q: Did you find the Heritage Foundation, which is a think tank, you might say from the right, did you find they had an agenda dealing with this or was this just problem solving?

BREMER: No, it was pretty straight forward. Most think tanks do have political color. Brookings is left and Heritage is right. But my experience with all of them is that the people there take their job pretty seriously. I don't remember all of the circumstances but we called in outside experts. For example, one of the things the National Commission on Terrorism had found was that America does a very poor job of tracking immigrants once they come here, whether they are legal or illegal -- and also a very poor job of tracking students who come here on student visas. We found a couple of examples of people who came here to study from the Middle East to study things like English literature and subsequently transferred and to become nuclear engineers. At least the U.S. government ought to have a mechanism that tells us that Abdul has shifted from English literature to nuclear engineering. Anyway, the National Commission had made that point and the Heritage study looked more closely at some of the questions about how the government can more effectively monitor people once they are in the country.

The Heritage study was ignored like most of these studies, the National Science Foundation study. The Gilmore Commission did have the impact of recommending the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security which become law

So I stayed involved in various aspects of counter terrorism. I strongly supported the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was my first Foreign Service post so it resonated with me. In the run up to the Iraq war, I was frequently asked for comments by the press. I supported the president.

Q: How did you feel, you probably steeped in this terrorism thing just about more than anybody else in the country, working on this and how did you feel Iraq fit into the destruction of the Twin Towers?

BREMER: I never had a view that it did. I was naturally mindful of the National Commission's assessment that we faced a new threat of Islamic extremists who wanted to kill us by the hundreds of thousands, as they themselves admitted, and that these people might get their hands on weapons of mass destruction. Iraq had been labeled a terrorist state by successive administrations of both parties and had clearly developed weapons of mass destruction. In the run up to the war, 2002 and into 2003, all of the evidence that was public, and apparently what was private as well, suggested they were continuing their program of nuclear weapons development. They had violated 17 U.N. resolutions trying to stop them. I shared the general view that this was potentially a major problem, not just because of Iraq's history of aggression against its neighbors, Iran and Kuwait, but also because of the possibility that it had ties with terrorist groups, I don't say al-Qaeda, although it turns out they did have contacts with them. At the beginning of 2003 my concern was the possible threat posed by Iraq's record of support for terrorism and its use of chemical weapons.

My bigger concern was the impact of a nuclear Iraq on the regional balance of power. So I was looking at it as both an old-fashioned realist from my experience in counterterrorism. In the run up to the war, I supported the administration's approach.

Several times in 2002 people in the administration contacted me informally about whether I would be willing to come back in the government, particularly in the homeland security area. One idea was that since I had been involved in both the Heritage study and the Gilmore commission, perhaps I would become the special assistant for homeland security. The job Tom Ridge eventually took. At some point somebody talked about my coming in and taking over CIA.

Francie was strongly opposed to my going back in government. She has a chronic pain syndrome called fibromyalgia which leaves her in need of my support. So on a number of occasions, I had said no.

In 2003, shortly after the war started March 19, I was contacted by Scooter Libby, the vice president's chief of staff, about possibly coming into government and post conflict operation in Iraq. I have written the rest of it in my book. Eventually Paul Wolfowitz asked me as a follow-up to talk to him in his office. I then persuaded Francie that I should probably throw my hat in the ring, which I did. So that's how I got pulled into this.

Q: Rumsfeld was so much a part of this whole operation with Iraq. Did you get any feel that he was behind you?

BREMER: I didn't know who was behind it. After Francie said, "OK, go ahead and tell them you are willing to be considered". Some weeks later, toward the end of April, 2003, my assistant had a call from Rumsfeld's office on a Wednesday afternoon asking me to come see him on Thursday.

I knew Rumsfeld back in the Nixon-Ford years when I had been Kissinger's chief of staff and Rumsfeld was secretary of defense. I had known him again when I was special

assistant to Shultz and executive secretary in 1982- 83. Rumsfeld was called in by President Reagan to be his special emissary to the Middle East. He went off and worked with countries in the region, including the Saudis and, ironically, with Saddam Hussein because the Iraq-Iran war was going on. We had seen each other periodically in the next ten or fifteen years, but I had no sense he was behind anything until I got called into his office on that Thursday afternoon.

We chatted a bit and he had a list of people he was considering, which he showed me. I don't remember who all was on the list; there were 10 or 12 names there.

At that point, Baghdad had fallen. This was around the 27th of April. I said I was willing to be considered. He asked me if I foresaw any problems with any of the president's national security team and I told him I had known the vice president for a long time (we had been classmates). I had contact with him when he was secretary of defense and when he was in the private sector. I had known Colin Powell for more than 20 years. He had been V Corps commander in Germany when I was ambassador to the Netherlands in the first Reagan administration. He was national security adviser when I was ambassador for counterterrorism in the second Reagan administration. Rice, I had known when she was NSC director for Russian affairs. I said there might be a problem with George Tenet who was still at CIA. When Rumsfeld asked why, I told him about the disagreements with Tenet as a result of the National Commission on Terrorism. He said, "I am going to check with all of them and will get back to you."

His office then called me back that same evening around 6:30 to say I had an appointment with the president at 10 the next morning.

What Rumsfeld had been told about me before and by whom, I don't know.

Q: As somebody who has been around the block for a while, looking at Washington, what I hear about Rumsfeld is that he seemed to want to keep people who really knew the area, the Arab world out of the picture. You had this terrorism and management background but except for Afghanistan, the Middle East wasn't your thing. I would have thought that this would have attracted him. Did you ever get that feeling?

BREMER: No. I didn't, but in retrospect something Wolfowitz said to me in the interview I had with him before meeting Rumsfeld was interesting. We were talking about Iraq and Wolfowitz asked me, "You do believe in democracy?" I said, "Of course, I believe in democracy." He said, "No, I mean for the Middle East." I knew what he was talking about. I said, "Yes, absolutely. I don't believe there are any people in the world that aren't capable of democratic self government." It is a fair criticism of the State Department that the so-called experts, which comes to your point, often have argued that this or that people are not capable of self government.

I'll tell you the story I tell when I do speeches. When I was in Afghanistan in the '60s the "experts" said, "Well, these Afghans, tribal, patriarchal. They are never going to have any

self government. It's never going to happen." Well, they've got it. It's rough and ready but they've got a democracy.

When I was working for Kissinger in the'70s, there was considerable debate about the Koreans. Again the "experts" argued that this is the hermit kingdom that goes back forever. They have always had a strongman in charge. The Koreans can never be democratic. These were the guys so steeped in the culture that they couldn't see that Korea could be a democracy as it is today.

In the '80s when I was working for George Shultz, the Latin American experts said of the Latin Americans, these are male cultures, they can never be democratic. Both Nicaragua and El Salvador are functioning democracies today. Ironically in Nicaragua it's a communist, Ortega who is the president -- but he got elected.

It was the same story in the '90s when I was a businessman. The conventional wisdom was that "these Indonesians... 13,000 islands with all these different religions, they can't be a democracy." Suharto was still in power in those days. Today Indonesia is a democracy.

I still believe that any people can have responsible government. I suspect that's why Wolfowitz asked if I believed in democracy. Perhaps he worried that if they chose a regional "expert" he might not believe the Iraqis were capable of self-governing.

I don't know who else Rumsfeld may have considered. He did not make any effort to keep me from having expert advisers around me who were regional experts particularly Hume Horan, our Foreign Service colleague who was my senior adviser there. Both the British deputies were Arabic speaking. One was serving concurrently as the British ambassador to Cairo, John Sawers, he's now ambassador to the U.N. At the end of my time in Iraq there were five serving American ambassadors, all of them Arabists, on the CPA staff.

Q: I have talked to people who have done this, Robin Raphel, John _____ and several others who felt that they had been slipped under the Rumsfeld radar to go to Iraq.

BREMER: I don't know. Robin was already there when I got there. She went to Kuwait with Jay Garner and I assume Garner's staff was put together by the Pentagon.

Q: I will second what you said about Korea because I served in Korea twice; once with the high rank of airman first class during the Korean War and the other time as consul general in the mid '70s and Park Chung-hee was going strong. There is a tendency in the Foreign Service to straight line everything. If you've got a hard-line government, it will always be hard-line. This is true of the Soviet Union.

BREMER: Well, I think a diplomat should try to understand the history and the culture of a country to which he is assigned because it affects the way the people in that country think about themselves and the future. There is always a risk that as you get deeper into

the culture you become so understanding of that country's culture, history, etc that you become imprisoned by it and forget that you are there to promote America's interests. I think that President Bush was right when he said there are no people in the world that are not capable of self-government. Given a choice of their kind of government, people are all capable of self government. Of course the route to self government can be very difficult as we've seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the road to the goal will be heavily influenced by the country's history, culture, geography -- by a whole host of factors.

I believed and I still believe that the introduction of democratic, self-government into Iraq can turn out to be one of the most dramatic changes in that region in centuries. Once Iraq stabilizes, as I still hope it will, it can be a model for self-government in other Arab countries.

Q: I think you've got a very strong point as one looks at this over a period of time. There are tremendous problems including the thought of all of a sudden democracy going to Saudi Arabia with the Wahabi influence and all that maybe winning one of these elections and you know, having to spend decades working out from under it.

BREMER: That's true. Getting from A to B in a place like Saudi Arabia or Egypt is not going to be a straight line. There are going to be a lot of down points and you have to hope when the music stops you've got a moderate, self governing country at peace with its neighbors.

Q: Back now going to Iraq; how did you feel? Did you have instructions, did you sort of have a feeling, OK, I can do this, I know what I want to do or was it, OK, I'll do what the president says? How did you feel about this?

BREMER: Until I was offered the job by the president, I really didn't know what the administration's plan was. As I wrote in my book, the first thing the president said to me was "Why would you want this job?" He probably had a more realistic assessment of what I was up against than I did.

Only when I started getting briefed did I get more of the picture. I got glimpses of what later became clearer which was that there were different views inside the administration about what the post conflict plan was. And it was only after I had left Iraq that I learned that there had been two different views on what America's role was going to be the post conflict position. According to some accounts, in March just before the war, the President is said to have concluded that we would have a short occupation, immediately establish an interim Iraqi government, and, in effect, turn it over to the Iraqis right away. On the basis of this the military was planning a very dramatic and quick withdrawal from Iraq.

I did learn what the military was planning before I left in May of 2003. At the time, we had about 180,000 American troops in Iraq and the Chiefs briefed me on their intention to draw down to 30,000 by August 1st. This stunned me. The looting was going on; every day more buildings were being burned down in Baghdad and other major cities. Everyday there were pictures of looting in Baghdad and here we were going to go from 180,000 to

30,000 in something like three months. Even just the logistical challenge of withdrawing 150,000 men and their equipment in three months seemed out of size.

Also before I left my good friend, Foreign Service officer Jim Dobbins, had just completed a long study for the think tank RAND. The study looked at all the post conflict situations America had been involved in over the past half century, starting with our occupations in Germany and Japan and then going through all the others -- Haiti, the Balkans, etc. He showed me a draft report that he had just completed that looked at the appropriate ratio of troops on the ground to populations in each of those countries needed to stabilize those post conflict situations. His study's metric suggested that in Iraq, with a population of some 27 million, rather than having 180,000 -- quickly dropping to 30,000 as the Joint Chiefs planned -- we would need something like 500,000 troops. That was a stunning disconnect to me. If Jim's numbers were to be believed, based on the past 50 years' experience in many other places, we didn't have even half the number of troops we needed. So that was element number one. I thought Jim's draft report was sufficiently important that I sent the executive summary to Rumsfeld saying I thought he should consider its conclusions. I also mentioned it to the president when I had lunch with him a day or two later.

So on the military side and there was a plan to get down and get out very fast with no apparent consideration being given to the likelihood that history suggested we were going to need not fewer but a lot more troops.

On the political side Jay Garner and Zal Khalilzad were out in Iraq talking about an immediate handover to a small group of Iraqi exiles that the administration had been talking to for more than a year. This was brought home to me rather dramatically when I heard on the 6 am news one morning on my way into the Pentagon that Garner had just announced that there would be an interim government in Iraq by the middle of the next week, around the 15th of May. This didn't fit with what the president and his advisers were saying: that we were going to take our time, help the Iraqis establish a representative government. The president had been very clear. So there was some kind of a disconnect.

You asked me, did I have my own agenda? No, my agenda was to do what the president said which was take your time, get it right. Secretary Powell said we're going to do it and Cheney agreed. The clear message before I left for Iraq was we are going to take our time and do it right.

Talking to lots of people after I came back from Iraq, I think that while the president may have made decided for a short occupation before the war and the military drew the conclusion that they could draw down quickly, some time after the fall of Baghdad on April 9 the President changed his mind. His policy probably shifted because the emerging chaos suggested we weren't going to be able to get out of there quickly. It was clear, on the contrary to what Wolfowitz had testified before the war, that Iraq would not be able to pay for its reconstruction. The economy was in much worse shape than we had believed. So somewhere in the time frame between March 10th when the president made

his first decision and when I started talking to the administration, which was six weeks later, the policy had changed. As the actions by the Chiefs and statements by Garner showed, this shift does not appear to have been made clear to everybody.

The political track, Garner and Khalilzad, and the security track which the Joint Chiefs were following, were headed in a direction of let's get out and go home; whereas the president and Powell and the vice president and as far as I could tell, Rumsfeld, all of these people were headed down a path that assumed it's going to take time. So there was a disconnect and it took us a while to get that sorted out. We never did get the security part sorted out. We never had enough forces and never had the right counterinsurgency strategy while I was there.

Q: Did any of the other players in the Pentagon, Feith, was he in, because I understand he has written a book sort of pointing the finger at you. You are the problem and all that. I was wondering if these personalities were, early on did you get a feel about the difference between sort of the military people at the Pentagon and the civilians at the Pentagon?

BREMER: No, I didn't get a feel for it. It may have been there. It was a rather intense couple of weeks. I had very little interaction with Feith at that point other than, as I wrote in my book, he presented me with his de-Baathification decree the day before I left for Iraq. I don't remember much else about him at that point.

Q: As you say, you were getting so busy being brought up to speed, there wasn't much time to get a feel about as always happens in intense political situations, personalities start beginning to

BREMER: There was plenty going on. As presidential envoy reporting to him through Rumsfeld, which is what the president directed me, I needed to pay particular attention to what the president and Rumsfeld and the national security team had as their strategy. To me their strategy was quite clear and there may or may not have been disagreements at the second or third levels down in various parts of the Pentagon about this, I don't know.

Feith's argument as I understood it was that I unilaterally changed the president's policy. That's nonsense. It doesn't begin to hold up to the facts, as I have written separately. I kept Rumsfeld and the President fully informed of what I proposed to do every step of the way. I have checked my files and found that I communicated the plans no fewer than 39 times -- in writing, by phone and in person -- to these officials between my arrival in May 2003 and September 2003 which is the time that Feith alleges, in his book, he and his colleagues were shocked to hear about the plan we had by then been implementing for almost five months. The facts simply do not support this allegation. I wrote an article, National Review, March 19 2008, in which I laid out in detail how often I had informed officials in Washington of the plan we were carrying out. Not once did they raise questions, until Feith and others at DOD alleged they were "surprised" by my actions in September 2003. There is not a shred of evidence to support his contention.

Whether Feith understood that the president's policy had changed, I don't know. He was present at a meeting of the principals of the National Security Council on the 8th of May 2003 at which the secretary of state said very clearly, "The president's guidance is that we are not to hurry establishing an interim Iraqi administration". At that same meeting the Vice President agreed. The President repeated this directive in almost the same words at a full National Security Council meeting the next day. So I don't know whether Feith was not paying attention at that meeting or didn't want to hear the message. But there is no question what the president's policy was.

Q: Did Condoleezza Rice play any role particularly before you went out?

BREMER: I met with her and I saw her in her office, at the principals' meetings, at the national Security Council meetings and at a couple of meetings with the president. But in accordance with the President's directive, I was looking to Rumsfeld for immediate day to day guidance.

Q: Today is June 2, 2009. The last time you are getting ready to go to Iraq. You mentioned that your line of command ran from Rumsfeld to the president. There seemed to be sort of a disconnect between the uniformed military and what the president wanted. The president was there for the long run and the military were getting ready to say, "OK, we've got three months and we are out of here."

By the time I was contacted by Secretary Rumsfeld and met the president which was towards the end of April, it was very clear from the president's initial conversations with me, both when we met in the Oval Office and then when we had lunch a few days later, that he was preparing for a long-term stay in Iraq in order to get Iraq on the path to representative government. He was very clear to me then and to his entire national security team three days later, on May 9.

Soon after I got to Iraq General Abizaid, at the time deputy commander of CENTCOM, concluded we should not go forward with that withdrawal of 150,000 troops and the process was stopped.

Then there were additional problems. The commander of Coalition forces in Iraq was David McKiernan, an army lieutenant general. He had led the invasion of Iraq and the plan was for him to be rotated out and to be replaced by a new general around the first of June by Lieutenant General, Ricardo Sanchez. The Corps headquarters which had been supporting McKiernan was withdrawn when he left. So as Sanchez has written in his book, he was left without a Corps level staff which Sanchez says left him severely understaffed. In addition to not having enough boots on the ground, he didn't have enough staff on the ground. The key missing ingredient was the small size of his intelligence staff, which as the insurgency grew toward the end of 2003 meant we had little clear sense of the insurgency's scope, deployment and strategy.

Q: The withdrawal of the staff, was this sort of something that slipped through the quick withdrawal plan? You think of Donald Rumsfeld as being such a detailed person.

BREMER: I don't know what happened there. It is the kind of decision which would normally be made by the secretary of defense. But I have no direct knowledge.

Q: I was just wondering if you were hearing sort of bitching about this.

BREMER: Sanchez raised concerns about it through military channels. I did not discuss this issue of losing the corps headquarters with Rumsfeld though as mentioned I raised the broader question of our overall troop strength with him and with the President before I left Washington.

Q: You talked about this study that Rand had done by Jim Dobbins and all but was anybody, when you take the Japanese and the Germans, which are highly centralized societies, they sort of take commands and all, was anybody from the State Department or something saying, "You know the Iraqis are a whole different breed of animal"? I was told this back in '58. The Iraqis of all the Arabs were the most disputatious, when aroused could be the nastiest and all that and so that you really needed, normal ratios didn't apply.

BREMER: A lot very good State Department people were helping me as soon as I got there. They included Ryan Crocker who had been assigned to Iraq in the '70s and subsequently went back as ambassador to Iraq. I had asked Hume Horan, at that time the most senior Arabist in the Foreign Service, to be on the team. He had served twice in Iraq. Hume had been Ambassador to four countries including Sudan and Saudi Arabia. There were dozens of other Arabic speaking diplomats from many countries serving on the CPA staff.

But we never got the security situation under control. I raised on a number of occasions my concerns directly with the president and the vice president about two factors; one, we didn't have enough boots on the ground and, secondly, we didn't have an effective counterinsurgency strategy in place. As we now know, we didn't get the effective counterinsurgency strategy in place until 2007-2008.

Q: When you went out there, were you talking about a counterinsurgency or was this sort of pillaging mobs?

BREMER: Well, it changed. When I got there looting was taking place all over the country, very extensive and destructive looting, not just people stealing television sets and stuff. It was very destructive. Seventeen of the 21 government ministries were destroyed in Baghdad -- just destroyed. So, for example, the ministry of finance had been so severely damaged that even a year later they had room in their building for only half the ministry's employees. So this, the government's most important ministry, was working a two shift basis. Some people would come at 9 and work until 1; other people

would come at 1 and work until 5 or 6. Our lack of response to the looting set a bad tone from the outset.

About two months after I arrived, the station chief showed me a document that they had found in one of the destroyed ministry of interior secret service buildings. It was dated January 23, 2003. It was in Arabic; he had translated it. It was pre-war order from Saddam to all of his intelligence services saying in the event of a successful invasion, we will conduct a major campaign of destruction, assassination of Shia personnel, burning of buildings, destroying of records; all of the things we had seen after Baghdad fell. So some of the looting at least in retrospect appears to have been part of a pre war plan of Saddam.

Another motive for some of the looting was hatred of Saddam and his cronies. For example the ministry of interior was burnt to the ground. Not surprisingly, the Iraqis who had lived under Saddam were pretty angry. All of the police stations in the country were destroyed, all of the military barracks were destroyed. So some of the looting was no doubt rage and revenge on the part of the Iraqis for having been oppressed for so long.

And there were isolated attacks on American soldiers during that early period -- May, June, July. The security situation took a new downward turn in August with the successive bombing of the Jordanian embassy on August 8th, the bombing of the U.N. mission, which killed my friend the UN representative, Sergio de Mello on August 19th, and then a massive car bomb in Najaf on August 30th which killed some 200 Iraqis. We began to see in August and September an increase in what eventually became the insurgency. The major uptick in insurgent attacks was in the period of Ramadan in the fall which in 2003 was from October 25th to about November 25th. By the fall it was clear to us we were not just dealing with isolated attacks; there was a plan.

Q: When you arrived there, there were two decisions which sort of people in the usual Washington shorthand refer to as to being horrible mistakes and all. One was the disbanding of the Iraqi army and two, the de-Baathification and all. In the first place, was this really the case and what prompted this and how did you see this play out?

BREMER: Taking de-Baathification first: The Baath Party was intentionally modeled on the Nazi Party. Saddam Hussein admired -- and he was quite public about it -- the way Hitler had used the Nazi Party and secret services to control the German people. So he had more or less the same system for the Baath Party.

Q: They almost had a successful uprising against the British.

BREMER: During World War II there had been substantial influence of Nazi ideology in parts of the Middle East, including the Baath Party. By 2003, most Iraqis hated the party. Only ten percent of them were members, about two million member in the party. Of these, some were members just because it was the only way to advance your government career.

During 2002, the State Department had consulted a broad range of Iraqis to consider The Future of Iraq, as the Department's study was titled. Ryan Crocker ran the study at State. The Iraqis, who rarely agree on much, were unanimous that the Baath Party had no role to play in the future of Iraq after liberation.

On April 10th, the day after Baghdad fell, the commander of coalition forces, General Tommy Franks, issued his "Freedom Message" in which he outlawed the Baath Party. So the party had already been outlawed by the time I rejoined government.

The question then was what do we do now? The Pentagon, under the direction of Undersecretary Feith, drafted a de-Baathification decree, broadly following the de-Nazification ideas that were used in the German occupation but much milder. In the case of the de-Baathification decree which the Pentagon drafted, it said first of all it will affect only the top one percent of the party, some 20,000 people -- in other words less than one tenth of one percent of the Iraqi people. Secondly, the decree said only that the small number of people affected would no longer have jobs in the government. They would be free to become farmers or businessmen or journalists or whatever. Unless they had criminal charges against them, they were free. So it was a very narrowly drawn decree which Feith drafted and cleared with other US agencies and which I issued.

We started taking public opinion polls in September of '03 and took them regularly every several weeks until we left in 2004. The polls consistently showed De-Baathification was the single most popular thing the occupation did during its time in Iraq, usually supported by 94-95% of the Iraqi people.

It was the right thing to do. In fact, criticism that we got from Iraqis was that the decree did not go far enough. There were pressures among Iraqi leaders to broaden the decree to say the Baath people not only couldn't work in government, but they shouldn't be allowed in the private sector either, which is what happened in de-Nazification. There's no question in my mind if we had turned this process over to the Iraqis immediately, they would have implemented a far more stringent policy against the Baathists and provoked a sectarian battle much sooner than it happened.

Q: Jerry, I am talking about sort of perceptions because the perception I got from listening to my colleagues and glancing at the papers and all this was this was a very stringent thing. Anybody who'd been a Baathist was out.

BREMER: I can't account for how the press reported it. As I said, the decree affected less than one tenth of a percent of the Iraqis.

Q: Yes, I know but this is very important at how things work. Did you ever one, try to counter this? Two, did the press corps try to do something or was this sort of a quarters of power in the Pentagon, the State Department whispering things that got going? Something was happening.

BREMER: First of all, when we issued the decree, there was almost no criticism at all. The issue was not even widely reported in the American and international press until almost a year later, in 2004.

Let me go back: when I announced this policy, I said to the decree establishes our objective -- as soon as possible -- to turn over to an Iraqi de-Baathification council responsibility for implanting the decree. We understood that many people might have joined the party simply to get a job. We also understood that we, the CPA, would not be able to determine whether Abdul had joined the party because he believed the ideology, or because he wanted a job. My mistake was turning the implementation over to a group of Iraqi politicians, to the Governing Council which then turned it over to Ahmed Chalabi, a controversial figure, in Iraq and here. The Iraqi-run de-Baathification Council when it got running in early 2004, began to apply the decree much more broadly than intended and, in fact, expelled thousands of teachers from their jobs.

Public criticism began about then because the decree was being applied more broadly than we intended. We had to do undo what the Iraqi de-Baathification council had done. I worked with the Iraqi minister of education. We reinstated some 11,000 teachers who had been incorrectly de-Baathified.

Q: What was happening? Chalabi as you say is controversial and continues to be controversial. The council which he was on, why this, was this tribal, was this political getting rid of so many people? What was going on?

BREMER: I think there were a lot of different trends. One was the Iraqi Shia who are 60% of the population, deeply resented the centuries-old domination of the Sunnis from the Ottoman times, then under the British, under the Hashemite king, and then under the Baath Party. So there was some understandable historic resentment on the part of the Shia.

Some of it had to do with score settling. During my time in Iraq I met thousands of Iraqis. I never met an Iraqi who had not had some relative killed or tortured by Saddam Hussein or his secret services. So there was a degree of understandable outrage about the Baath Party. And some of it was probably score-settling at a political level; some members of the exile community, for example, Ayad Allawi had been a member of the Baath Party back in the ‘60s. He was one of Chalabi’s main competitors for political power. So there was an aspect of that here. So there were a lot of different trends.

Instead of turning the implementation of this very narrowly decree over to a group of politicians, I should have established some kind of a judicial review panel made up of non-political Iraqi lawyers, and there are such people, and had them implement the decree.

Q: There was a, I take it under Saddam, there was no, you might say, separate judicial branch?

BREMER: There was a judicial branch. But Saddam followed the model of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and of many totalitarian countries. He set up courts wherever he wanted and called them "special tribunals" "military courts"," special courts" -- whatever he wanted -- as a way of circumventing the established judicial system.

Soon after arriving, I set up a Coalition judicial panel composed of American, British, and Australian lawyers to work with Iraqi lawyers. There were some 850 judges on the government rolls in Iraq. The panel went through each of those judge's files to see which of these judges we could give a clean bill of health to. The majority of them were untainted by Saddam because he went around the standing judicial system. In effect, under Saddam there had been no law and order. As I recall, we were able to clear about 600 of them to participate in the reconstituted judicial system. I also signed a law establishing the independence of Iraq's judiciary, a decision urged by the new Iraqi Minister of Justice and one which found its way into the Constitution written by the Iraqis.

Q: Did you find as you came in essentially pretty much an intact administrative skeleton or core?

BREMER: Yes, that's another one of the myths about de-Baathification. People say that the process stripped the government of all its personnel and collapsed the government. This is nonsense. In the 21 ministries all of the ministers and deputy ministers had fled before Baghdad fell on April 9. They were either out of the country or they were in hiding. They were gone. So the de-Baathification decree did not affect the topmost people in the government. In the ministries most of the civil servants had stayed at their desks. They were competent civil servants usually headed by a Director General.

But you have to remember that the bureaucratic infrastructure in these ministries was almost non existent. They had no computers. They had few phones, and there was no national phone system in place except for members of the Revolutionary council. The banks were all closed down and there was no way to transfer funds between branches. There was no internet. There were no internal management information systems. No coherent sets of accounts. And so on. In effect, these ministries were functioning in a 19602 or 1970s work environment.

Q: A director general normally being the top professional.

BREMER: The top civil servant, yes, except a few ministries. I think the ministry of finance had a secretary general which was one level up from director general. Mostly it was director generals. Most of these men -- and they were mostly men except for two ministries -- the ministry of planning and the ministry of agriculture had women in senior positions. Most of these senior civil servants were in their mid-50s. They had been working in that ministry all their careers for, say, 30 years. So they had always worked under Saddam Hussein. They had never known any other system. They were, by and large, competent but extremely and understandably cautious. The problem we had was not that de-Baathification had some dramatic effect on the ministries. It didn't. The

problem was that these civil servants, even the top one, were very reluctant to take responsibility or initiative. I could understand this because under Saddam Hussein if you took initiative and it was wrong, your tongue was cut out, your head was cut off, your daughter was raped, you were sent to jail -- something very unpleasant happened. So you did not take chances.

You know, in the State Department we complain about the clearance process. Well, the way it worked in Iraq, if you were a deputy director general of ministry of transportation and you wanted to buy a new railroad car, you got 12 or 13 people to sign the document before you sent it up to the minister. So that if something went wrong and the secret service came around and said, "OK, Abdul, what were you doing?" you could at least say, "Look, Mohammad agreed and Tariq agreed". So you had some protection. Reminds you of the clearance process, but here if you get it wrong you're unlikely to suffer as would an Iraqi civil servant.

We faced a "cultural bureaucratic" problem. We worked closely with the ministry of finance to get budgets out to the other ministries but the system was slow, atrophied by decades of bureaucratic caution. For example, when I made my first call on the minister of irrigation, a Kurd, he said "I've got a great plan to create jobs. I can create tens of thousands of jobs cleaning up canals that have silted up in southern Iraq." Southern Iraq is Shia land and after the Shia uprising in 1991, Saddam had forbidden them to maintain canals. It is an agricultural area so the canals are vital to the economy. They had silted up and become saline. The Minister's idea was, "If you give me 20 million dollars, we can get men and boys and women and everybody working down there." I thought it was a great idea and asked the minister of finance if he could agree to send the minister of irrigation the money. He agreed.

But we found that it took weeks to get the money transferred because of the inherent conservatism in the ministry of finance. They weren't going to just send 20 million dollars. Since there was no system of electronic transfer of funds anywhere, all funds had to be transferred in cash. So any movement meant a convoy to take the 20 million dollars to the ministry of finance or from the central bank to the ministry of irrigation. Eventually the money went over there and we did create several hundred thousand jobs in short order.

The CPA financial advisor said that we faced a terrible case of "bureaucratic constipation". It took a long time to get anything moving because of this inherent conservatism. That had a far greater impact on getting the system moving than de-Baathification. The key point is that all the ministries kept functioning, led by long-serving civil servants until Iraqi Ministers took office on September 1 2003.

Q: Did you find in this conservatism and wanting clearances and actually not acting, was there also almost a sabotage element or something like that?

BREMER: We sometimes wondered. There probably were sympathizers with the old regime in some of the ministries. From time to time we wondered if there was intentional

sabotage going on, and I am sure there was in some cases, but I think most of it was not that.

Q: I would have thought that a regime such as Saddam's, there really wouldn't be too many loyalists.

BREMER: I think most of the loyalists left. Certainly the ministers and deputy ministers were all gone.

Q: When I talk to almost anyone I can think of they say, "Well, yeah. Bremer made two bad mistakes; one, he removed all the Baathists and all the technical people from the government and two, he disbanded the army and they should have been at least paid to police the borders."

BREMER: Right. This is the conventional wisdom and, like most conventional wisdom, it is wrong.

Let's talk about the army; first of all, what was the army? The army under Saddam Hussein was an army as large as the American army in a country one twelfth the size of the United States. It was an army dominated, like most institutions, by Sunnis. It was extremely officer heavy. In an army the size of the American army Iraq's had some 12,000 generals. The American army at that time had 307 generals, to give you an idea of the contrast.

Q: It was replicating the Soviets who have a very heavy.

BREMER: They were largely equipped and trained by the Soviets. And like the Soviet army it was a conscript army. Most of the enlisted men were Shia, and as in the Soviet army, as portrayed by Solzhenitsyn, the conscripts were regularly brutalized, sodomized, tortured, and killed by their officers. The officer corps was predominantly Sunni. It was not a place you particularly wanted to spend a lot of time if you were a draftee. There were about 315,000 enlisted men.

During the war the army saw which way the war was going. The enlisted men took their rifles and went home, back to their farms, or villages or apartments. Before they went home, in many cases, they destroyed the barracks out of rage against the army and their officers. Before I even returned to government, General Abizaid, then the deputy commander of CENTCOM, on April 17 2003 reported that there was not a single unit of the Iraqi army standing to arms anywhere in the country. There was no army. The mistake I made was the use of the term 'disbanding' because there wasn't any army to disband. The Pentagon's own term was the Iraqi army had 'self-demobilized'. The top civilians in DOD had concluded that "the army had in fact disbanded."

So the question we had faced was do we recall the army? There were practical and political reasons not do recall it. Practically, recalling the draftees would have meant sending American soldiers into the villages and towns and farms where the Shia

conscripts had gone and forcing them back into an army they hated. Is that how we were going to use American forces? We were going to use American forces to go force, brutalize conscripts back into an army they hated, under officers they hated? Is that what we were going to do? At this point, we didn't even have enough Coalition forces to secure Iraq's borders.

Secondly, there was no place to put the army. There were no barracks. They had all been demolished in the post war looting.

The political argument against recalling the army was more important than the practical problems. In the 1980s, the army had conducted what is generally recognized as a genocidal war against the Kurds, killing hundreds of thousands of Kurds, displacing even more, even using chemical weapons on the Kurds in Halabja in 1988.

Q: This is where 'Chemical Ali' came into prominence. I mean, it is really the only case that we can think of in modern times where a military force has used chemical weapons.

BREMER: Actually, no. The Libyans used chemical weapons in Chad in the 1980s. And of course the Iraqis used chemicals against the Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war. So that's what Saddam's army had done to the Kurds who make up about 20% of Iraq's population.

In 1991 after we expelled Iraq from Kuwait, the Iraqi Shia rose up. They compose about 60% of Iraq's population and rose up against Saddam in the hopes that America would follow up its victory in Kuwait by liberating them from their hated leader. We stood by as Saddam repressed them brutally, here too using the Republican Guards and the army. They killed hundreds of thousands of Shia. So 80% of the population, the Kurds and the Shia, were very clear about the likely results of our recalling the army. Each had heard rumors that some American soldiers favored recalling Saddam's army. The Kurdish leaders -- Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani -- told me if you recall the army, we Kurds will secede from Iraq. The secession of the Kurds from Iraq then or today or in the future will, in my view, bring on a major regional war. It will start civil war in Iraq. But it would also likely bring on a major regional war because neither the Iranians nor the Turks could tolerate an independent Kurdistan. The Shia leaders said they interpreted these rumors as showing our intention to install "Saddamism without Saddam." The Shias had been cooperating with the Coalition following guidance from Grand Ayatollah Ali-al Sistani. So the political arguments against recalling the army were even stronger than the practical arguments.

So what were we to do? Most of the so-called conventional wisdom doesn't pay attention to what we did. We decided to create a new Iraqi army. It would be a new all volunteer army. We said we would accept enlisted men from the old army and officers from the old army, up to the rank of colonel. We had no need initially to recruit officers above colonel because for at least a year, we would not need generals. We planned a three division army, but with only the first division up after a year. So we wouldn't need general

officers initially, and we figured we could promote colonels from within to be generals in the new army.

We decided to pay all the conscripts in the old army a one-time severance payment. We also paid all officers except for the top generals a monthly stipend; in reality, it was a pension which we calculated to be twice what they would have received under Saddam. We started those payments in July of 2003 and continued them to the former officers the entire time we were in Iraq. Those payments were continued by three successive Iraqi governments and continue to this day.

So it is incorrect to claim that the decision not to recall the army created thousands of unemployed and unpaid soldiers. They were being paid. They were free to engage in business matters if they wished. I don't doubt that some of these officers went into the insurgency and still continue to oppose democratic rule in Iraq. But they are doing it because they don't agree with the political process, not because they didn't get paid. They got paid and had ample economic opportunities beyond their pensions.

Q: Again I will come back to the same question. It seems to me really a Washington question and I realize you weren't in Washington but what was happening? On the military side, you were dealing with this but the whole thing has, it's been portrayed as you cast this whole military loose with its weapons and all and gave them no place to go.

BREMER: Two points. First, this decision was carefully vetted by our top national security advisor, Walt Slocombe, who had been Undersecretary of Defense under President Clinton. It was reviewed and approved by the secretary of defense, cleared with the Joint Chiefs of staff, with the army commander on the ground, General McKiernan, and approved by the President. The decision was not controversial at the time. When Slocombe called a press conference to announce the decision, two journalists showed up, neither of them Americans.

The first I heard anybody in our government raising doubts about the decision to build a new Iraqi army was six months later, in late October when the insurgency was picking up. General Abizaid then said to me that he had "always thought this was not a good idea." I said to him, "Always, John? That's the first I have heard of it."

I think it became a convenient excuse for fact that our government was not prepared for the counterinsurgency doctrine we needed. I admit that we in the CPA didn't do a good job of getting ahead of the story once it started to swing against us in the fall of 2003. We were too late in reacting once people started this narrative that this had been a mistake. We should have conducted a better strategic communications program on this in the summer of 2003.

One final point on this criticism of "disbanding" the army. In the Spring of 2004, the Marines were trying to subdue violence in the western city of Fallujah. The commanding general of the Marines decided, apparently on his own, to recall a brigade of the old Iraqi army there. The decision was taken without coordination or even information to the CPA.

They recalled the brigade's former Brigadier General, dressed him in his old army uniform and put him on television. It did not help that he was a dead ringer for Saddam. The recall of this single brigade caused a political crisis in Baghdad and among Iraqis everywhere. Several Iraqi Ministers resigned or threatened to resign. Several members of the Governing Council tendered their resignations. There was bewilderment in Washington about what was happening. Worse, when the recalled brigade was sent by the Marines into Fallujah, instead of helping to restore order, the entire unit went over to the enemy and itself had to be disbanded. I rest my case.

Q: To me, I have read your book and I have looked at this and we have been talking and I sort of come away with, and I am not sure where. It may have been the military. Things started to go wrong and things went wrong probably right from the beginning in the fact that we didn't send enough troops in, that's understood but once things go wrong, you gotta have a fall guy. I can't help but feel that you had been made the fall guy and it continues. If you beg the conventional Washington thinking the right decisions and all, we are now talking about six years later and we are just getting ready at the end of this month to withdraw our troops from the major cities with great trepidation. Obviously, the people who knew that what should be done have been in charge and yet it is still a mess.

Did you get the feeling you were being made the fall guy and one can't help but look at, I mean, there are a lot of very strong personalities who were involved with this, both civilian and particularly since the State Department was almost out of it, these were people who were both in the military department of defense and national security. Did you get the feeling you didn't get the support you should have?

BREMER: A couple of things: I have been in government long enough to know how wonderful hindsight can be. It is always convenient when things don't go as planned to find somebody to blame. I certainly felt by the fall of 2003, that the occupation had not gone as smoothly as some people hoped though I continued to believe that it would take a couple of years as I had told the President at our first meeting in early May. The insurgency was picking up and people were beginning to get nervous about the election the next year here.

Q: The elections of 2004.

BREMER: Yes. In late October, the president's chief of staff, Andy Card, took me aside to say, "I have a feeling people are starting to game you to try to make you into the fall guy. I want to make sure that doesn't happen." And then I after we left Iraq, the CPA disappeared as an institution which meant there was no institution in the US government to explain and defend the CPA's record.

Q: CPA is the?

BREMER: Coalition Provisional Authority, which I headed, doesn't exist anymore. The army still exists, the Pentagon exists, and the State Department exists. So all of the other protagonists in this drama are still around to defend themselves and put out stories. CPA

doesn't exist anymore; it's gone. There is no residual bureaucracy to defend what we did. So the CPA becomes a convenient scapegoat. Nobody ever said life was fair.

Q: But it can't help but rankle.

BREMER: But as we speak you can see the success of the surge and the adoption of the a new and effective counterinsurgency strategy, are beginning to show what we could have done during our period if we had had enough troops on the ground and the right strategy. In other words, once you can assure security, you can do the kinds of things we tried to do. That begins to shift the debate, not in terms of what you read in daily Washington Post, but in the terms of history.

Q: Let's turn to something that wasn't your, they really can't stick you with it, but weapons of mass destruction. This obviously, but this was put forward, including to his eternal regret I think by Colin Powell, got way out on a limb on weapons of mass destruction. How did you treat this?

BREMER: First of all, it is important to remember the history. Saddam had developed and used weapons of mass destruction. He used chemical weapons against the Iranians and his own people. He had a program to develop biological and nuclear weapons which the U.N. told him to stop after 1991 in a number of resolutions and which he lied about. For example, Saddam had been telling the U.N. and the IAEA Iraq didn't have any biological programs. The UN and IAEA looked for those weapons but only found the biological weapons in 1995 when an Iraqi defector took them to a farm house and showed them where Saddam's biological weapons were.

So the record was pretty clear by early 2003. Saddam had violated 17 consecutive U.N. resolutions. He had lied about his weapons of mass destruction programs. In 2003, the CIA but also the British, French, German and Russian intelligence services all concluded that Saddam had continued his programs of weapons of mass destruction. It was not just the CIA.

So put yourself in President Bush's shoes. He sees a long record of Saddam lying to the U.N. and the IAEA about his programs. There is a broad, essentially unanimous conclusion of these intelligence services, including three countries which opposed the war -- France, Germany and Russia -- that Iraq was continuing these programs. I can understand how the president would conclude Saddam is continuing to lie, he has no intention of giving up his weapons and we have to do something about it. We can't just continue talking in New York which we have been doing fruitlessly for the past 12 years.

The attacks of 9/11 changed the way in which a President -- any President -- had to assess the possibility of terrorist-supporting states giving weapons of mass destruction to these "new terrorists' we discussed earlier. Because we knew from the first and second World Trade Center attacks that they really meant it when they said they wanted to kill Americans by the hundreds of thousands. I supported the war, largely on that basis. And

the successive presidencies of both parties had designated Iraq as a terrorist-supporting state.

To answer your question, when I got to Iraq the CIA had already been assigned responsibility for looking for the weapons of mass destruction. In terms of my responsibilities, it really had only one major impact. I found that the CIA station was almost entirely devoted to the search for the weapons of mass destruction. We had very few people in the station who were experts on terrorism or counterinsurgency despite the fact that this was the largest station in the world.

I did not spend a lot of time personally on the hunt for weapons of mass destruction. David Kay represented the agency's effort there. He had something like 1,400 people looking over the physical and intelligence evidence. Every now and then some Iraqi politician would come to me with a tip and I would pass it on to the station. They would go see what they could find. In my view, the WMD program delayed the arrival in Iraq of some important capabilities in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism.

This became a problem during the course of the summer of 2003, enough of a problem that I called George Tenet the day after the bombing of the Jordanian embassy. I told him that I understood the importance of looking for weapons of mass destruction. But given the events on the ground, including that bombing, we needed counterterrorism and counterinsurgency experts in the station. I had worked closely with the agency's Counter terrorism Center (CTC) when I had been ambassador at large for counterterrorism, and I knew how good these people were.

Tenet agreed but it took until the end of 2003 before the system could mobilize enough people in the station to start dealing with the terrorism.

Q: The CIA had this counterterrorism group. What about the military? Again, were they staffed to really deal with terrorism and counterinsurgency.

BREMER: No, as we subsequently learned after General Petraeus finished his second tour in Iraq. His first tour was as the two star in charge of the 101st airborne in the north. His second was just before I left to do the training of the Iraqi army. Then he was sent back to the States to write a counterinsurgency manual for the army. It is a fair question to ask, "why did he have to write a counterinsurgency manual for the army?" He was not recalled to "edit" a manual, but to "write" it. And the answer is, because they didn't have one.

Q: As a matter of fact, I may be wrong on this, somebody I interviewed in the foreign service, an ambassador, retired had been working at the barracks up in Pennsylvania, Carlyle Barracks on a counterinsurgency school and Rumsfeld had closed it down. I may be wrong.

BREMER: I don't know anything about that. I do know that the problem of not having an effective counterinsurgency document in the army goes back to the post-Vietnam time. It

is nothing to do with Secretary Rumsfeld or Gates. After Vietnam, the army decided -- and the marines made a similar decision -- that they were not going to get involved in counterinsurgency again. I remember saying to one of my army Special Forces friends, "You didn't learn the lessons of Vietnam?" He replied, "Oh, no. We learned the lessons and decided to ignore them. We decided in the 1970s not to have a counterinsurgency doctrine in the army." A retired Marine who fought in Vietnam told me the same thing. So the lack of an effective counterinsurgency doctrine goes way back in both services.

Q: What was the sort of rationale for it?

BREMER: The rationale was that is not the kind of war they ever wanted to fight again. From the perspective of many military officers I have talked to since Vietnam, they felt that the US military had been left out on a limb by American politicians who, in their view, did not see the war through. Their view was that after the so-called Tet Offensive, we had won the war militarily only to have American politicians throw it away. So they understandably didn't want to be driven into that corner again.

I can also sympathize with how all this looked to Rumsfeld in 2001. He'd been secretary of defense in the 1970s and when he came back into office in 2001 he looked around and saw a U.S. military which by training, doctrine, deployment and equipment was well prepared for a ten division Soviet tank assault against the Fulda Gap in the northern German plains. He might have said to himself "Something is wrong with this picture. There is no Soviet Union anymore. The Russian army has moved 800 kilometers east." So he pushed hard for change to make the services lighter, faster, more mobile and more technologically capable. He was right. I agree with Rumsfeld's idea of a lighter, faster military.

Q: I think he had a great deal of support.

BREMER: Well, not in the services.

Q: Not in the services but I know looking and talking to people made great sense. The problem was how you run a war like Iraq where you need more troops.

Did you find that you were trying to put together an anti-insurgency team?

BREMER: No. I tried to do two things. First, I tried to get the intelligence community oriented more towards the enemy we were facing on the ground in Iraq. I thought it was a misallocation of intel recourses to have hundreds of agents looking for WMD when at that point it was unlikely that our guys would be killed by a chemical attack. They, other Coalition forces and of course hundreds of Iraqis were getting killed every day by gunfire and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), usually planted as roadside bombs.

So I raised with people in Washington the broader question of having the correct military strategy to deal with what we were facing. Dealing with Fallujah in an example. For the first nine months, the AOR (area of responsibility) of the 82nd Airborne was in Al Anbar

Province which included the city of Fallujah. Fallujah had been for a long time, even under Saddam, a very difficult place to control. Known to the Iraqis as their "wild west." There would be trouble in Fallujah. The 82nd would go in; they would arrest some people, they'd shoot some people, and then they would go back out to their FOB (Forward Operating Base) somewhere east of the city. So our forces were in and out of Fallujah three or four times in the first six months that I was in Iraq.

My deputy, Ambassador Clay McManaway had served for five years in Vietnam. He said this reminded him of the basic problem we had had in Vietnam. There our forces would go into a town, conduct operations but leave without making the people feel secure and without starting the rebuilding process. What was needed was a counter insurgency doctrine which came to be known as "clear, hold, rebuild". It was clear to us by October of 2003 that we had a strategic problem; it wasn't just a question of the number of troops on the ground. It was how we were employing the troops. I was not in the military chain of command so there was not much I could do except raise my concerns, which I did.

Q: With the military did you find often you were sort of going one direction and they were going in another? It wasn't just consultations but it's operations. How did this?

BREMER: Well, it's a complicated problem. There has been a lot of discussion, particularly by my friends at the State Department, that it was a mistake to put the Coalition Provincial Authority under the Pentagon rather than under the State Department. I think that criticism is wrong. My reasoning is that the head of the CPA was not going to be a military person, and certainly should not have been in Iraq. We had not conquered a country the way we had done in Germany or Japan. We didn't conquer Iraq; we expelled a hated regime. It seemed to me the last thing you wanted to have leading that occupation was a general. It follows that a civilian would be in charge of the occupational authority and therefore that he would not be in the military chain of command. . So there was going to be somebody who was a military guy running the military side of the job and there was going to be somebody as the civilian guy.

The way our government is organized it made bureaucratic sense for both of those people to report to the secretary of defense rather than having the CPA put in the State Department. It made send to have both the civilian and military officials in the Defense department and both report to the Secretary of Defense who is in both chains of command. Putting the CPA into the State Department would automatically force all the issues including perhaps minor ones, all the way up the chain to the President. Under the circumstances of the particular officials at the time -- a disputatious relationship between Rumsfeld and Powell -- I think it would have made things worse to have the occupation under the State Department. It would have exacerbated all of the already-existing tensions.

I don't say that's the solution always everywhere. But as long as you have a civilian head of the occupation authority, there is going to be a certain logic for putting it in the Pentagon. Pentagon also has two assets the State Department lacks: resources and a capacity to manage large-scale programs.

Q: How did you find Rumsfeld? Was he deluging you with these snowflakes or whatever you want?

BREMER: I have known him for a long time. When I was Kissinger's chief of staff, he was at the White House and then secretary of defense. I knew him in the '80s when he came back to work on Middle Eastern affairs. He is a demanding, extremely smart man but I won't say he is easy to work for. He asks a lot of tough questions. They are usually good questions and he wants quick answers. We didn't get the blizzard of his so-called "snowflakes" that people back in Washington got. I got a few. But most of our communication was on the phone and in writing.

Q: Your military commanders, you had what? Two while you were there?

BREMER: You are talking about the overall command of the forces?

Q: Yes.

BREMER: General McKiernan was the CFLCC (Coalition Forces Land Component Command) head for maybe three or four weeks after I arrived. Then General Sanchez commanded for the rest of the time.

Q: Were you on the same wavelength?

BREMER: More or less. There are differences obviously. There always will be differences between a civilian and a military person. The book I often commend to young Foreign Service officers is Diplomat Among Warriors by Robert Murphy. It gives a good sense of the challenges of being a political figure in a war.

My personal relations with Sanchez were good. There have been a lot of press stories about how we didn't get alone personally. Sanchez and I have talked about these stories and agree this is nonsense. On the other hand, as I saw happen when I served on the staff of secretaries of state, lower level staff people can begin battles with each other that don't necessarily reflect the overall relations between principals. I believe there were problems with some people on my staff and some on his staff which probably account for the stories. He and I did have a different perspective on things. He was a general and I was a diplomat. That's not surprising. It never became a major problem between us.

Q: While you were there, could you figure out whom you were fighting?

BREMER: It took us a long time. Most of out intelligence assets were directed toward WMD. So at least until the end of 2004, we didn't have much of an idea. Military intelligence was somewhat frustrating. I found that at an operational level -- if you went out to a unit in the field -- the captain there had a pretty good idea of who the bad guys in the neighborhood were and how they were connected via the tribal or ethnic mapping of the area. At a local level, this kind of intel led to effective operations. What we didn't

have and we never got during the time I was there was any good information about how the command and control of the overall insurgency worked.

Alongside the insurgency we had al-Qaeda terrorism, which became apparent with the attacks in August of 2003. In January of 2004, we got a very clear picture of what al-Qaeda was up to when we intercepted a letter from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, to his followers. He laid out his entire strategy, so that at least in terms of terrorist operations, we got a pretty clear sense of what the enemy's strategy was.

On the military side, the military interrogated a lot of Iraqis various military units had picked up, including the high value targets. I never really got a sense that we were getting useful intelligence out of all these interrogations. The system was stove-piped. Somebody would interrogate prisoner A about why he was planning a car bomb, what were his directives or objectives. This would be written up in an IR, Intelligence Report, which would go up the channel to DIA, the defense intelligence agency. Six other guys would interview six other detainees and those reports would go up to somebody. I never got the sense that the whole span of IRs was being examined or collated to see what it might teach us about the way the insurgency was being directed and organized. Maybe somebody was doing this, but it was never clear to me.

Q: Did you feel there were two wars going on? One was an insurgency and the other was the terrorist?

BREMER: I wouldn't say we thought of as two different wars. We considered them related and I think they were related at least until al-Qaeda overplayed its hand in early 2006 after I left. I think there were disgruntled Sunnis in Iraq who were willing to support the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks for their own reasons. They shared a tactical goal of making the American occupation fail. Strategically, they couldn't have been more different. The Saddam loyalists, if they shot their way back to power were going install again a secular, fascist type government like the one Saddam had run. If Al-Qaeda came to power, it was going to install a radical Islamist government. The two of them could never have agreed on what kind of government to put in place. Al-Qaeda eventually overplayed their hand and alienated the Sunnis. At the time I was there I think there was a fair amount of synergy, at least in their tactical objectives. Whether there was coordination, I don't know.

Q: On sort of the tribal sides, I don't know the Sunnis and the Shia. Did we have a good reading on these two implacable groups or you know, in our perspective or was there a lot of common ground? I would have thought that there would be a feeling of God, let's get this over with and have peace and settle down and raise children.

BREMER: There was not a long history of sectarian violence in Iraq. If you look back, intermarriages between the Sunni and Shia sects have been going on for centuries. All of the major tribes have both Sunni and Shia members. I met scores of Iraqis where the man was of one sect, the spouse another. Arabs married the Kurds. So there has also been inter-ethnic marriage.

On the other hand, the Saddam dictatorship lasted three times as long as Hitler was in power in Germany, just to give a sense of impact of his tyranny on Iraqi society. Saddam's rule was an extremely violent and polarizing experience for all Iraqis. Saddam's government had been predominately Sunni. Moreover the Sunnis had been in power in Iraq for centuries, under the Ottomans, the British, the Hashemites and for the last 30 years under the Baathists.

So Saddam's overthrow signaled a basic structural change in Iraqi power relationships. Our objective was to help the Iraqis move toward representative government. Representative government means majority rule and majority rule necessarily meant the Shia were going to have much more authority in post Saddam Iraq than they had ever had. This fundamental shift in power relationships certainly unsettled a lot of Sunnis. I think the Sunni boycott of the first elections in January, 2005, was an indication that they really hadn't understood that from now on the way you get power is not through bullets but through the ballot box. Fortunately, they reversed that boycott in the provincial elections just now in January, 2009. Our difficulty was first to try to get the Shia to understand that majority rule means respect for minority rights. You can't just run roughshod over the Sunnis now. It does not mean majoritarian rule. The complementary task was to persuade the Sunnis that they could advance their interests peacefully. .

At a minimum we were able to get enshrined in the interim constitution the principles of minority rights, individual rights, and the rule of law. Of course a constitution is only a piece of paper and it has been hard for successive Iraqi governments to actually implement it fully. This is not something that happens overnight. If you look at other post-conflict countries, the process takes a long time.

There were tensions already between the Shia and the Sunni communities and between the Arab and Kurdish communities. We tried to moderate those, first, by reassuring the Sunnis there would be an appropriate place for them in the new Iraq and, secondly, by cautioning the Shia that they had to take into account minority rights.

Q: Had there grown up sort of a non tribal middle class business people? I mean, you know what I mean; one that was beyond the tribal thing or did tribalism rule?

BREMER: My first Foreign Service post was Afghanistan so I often think about the comparisons. Iraq is a less tribal society than Afghanistan and also much more advanced economically. After the Second World War Iraq was the most advanced country in the Middle East; it had a middle class, had women in positions in both the private sector and government, had lawyers and doctors and great universities.

Q: Very literate too.

BREMER: Very literate, lots of artists too. It was the first Middle Eastern country to join the IMF, the first to have television. This was an important society.

But the Baath Party's political repression had a devastating effect on Iraqi society. Secondly, Saddam's economic mismanagement and in particular inflation during the war with Iran in the '80s did what inflation always does. It destroyed the middle class. A lot of middle class Iraqis left Iraq in the '80s and '90s. So there had been a significant depletion of what you might call moderate, more secular, less tribal elements of society. Still, 70% of the population was urbanized. It is the opposite in Afghanistan which has about 25% to 30% urbanization. Most of the territory that is today Iraq has been, for better or for worse, under some form of effective control from Baghdad for millennia. Kabul has never had that kind of the central control in Afghanistan. Still isn't today.

So there was and is a broad middle in Iraqi society which we tried to encourage and I think that sector has begun to be a bit more effective in trying to assert a moderating, less sectarian influence on Iraq society -- at least as we speak today.

Q: The role of religion, again, was there as you move into this middle class type of situation, Europe is going through what is described as sort of the post Christian era. You know, the role of religion is lessening in many places. What was your impression of it in Iraq?

BREMER: It is hard to generalize but religion remains a more important part of life in Iraq than in most parts of Europe. It is a country where something like 94 or 95% of the people are professed Muslims. There are some Christians and others. But, basically, it is a Muslim country.

Q: The religious leaders gave you, I have read your book. I mean, these were people you had to, in a way, did you have to reckon with them more than you might say political types?

BREMER: Ayatollah Sistani played an important role in the whole process while I was there.

Q: He is still I guess considered the top ayatollah in Iraq?

BREMER: Not only the top ayatollah in Iraq. He is the top ayatollah in Shia Islam. Many ancient historical sites of Shia Islam are in Iraq -- Kufa, Karbala and Najaf. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is certainly the most important religious leader in Shia Islam, not just in Iraq. He played an important -- sometimes helpful, sometimes complicating -- role in our efforts to move towards a representative government.

Q: As I recall in your book you had to keep some distance away.

BREMER: He refused to meet anybody from the occupation and still doesn't meet Americans.

Q: In a way it makes a certain amount of sense.

BREMER: I didn't have any problem with his position on that.

Q: Had we realized the absolute degradation of the whole infrastructure? One thinks of the electricity but it was of the water. Saddam just hadn't been paying his bills.

BREMER: No, I think one of the big surprises was how completely clapped out the economy was. You can say, well, we should have known. Yet I can understand that looking at the Iraqi economy in the '90s was not a high priority task for the intel people. Their focus was on WMD and trying to figure out what Saddam was up to. We didn't have an embassy so we had none of the usual overt reporting in the U.S. government about what was going on.

I was struck by a visit I made to a cotton factory in Hillah soon after I got to Iraq. I had been a commercial officer in my first five years in the Foreign Service so I looked at this factory through the eyes of a commercial officer. The name plates on the weaving machines were "Sheffield, England, 1963". Pigeons in the rafters, dirt on the floor, cobwebs all over the place. It was a complete mess. You didn't have to be an expert on textiles to realize you were dealing with a major problem. The impression was reinforced a week or so later when I visited Al Doura, the largest refinery in the country, on the south side of Baghdad. The nameplate read "Kellogg, 1952". Kellogg is the great grandfather of KBR, the Halliburton subsidiary and Kellogg has long since disappeared. In some places the pipes were patched with duct tape. The control room looked like something out of a 1950s science fiction TV program. If we had had an embassy, our commercial officers would sent report suggesting Iraq is really "on its uppers" as the British say.

The economic infrastructure was in much worse shape than prewar planning had indicated. It was one of the major surprises.

Q: It became particularly critical, crucial because you know, since one of our great battles was the ability to deliver electricity. Everything runs on electricity. I don't know how it is today, but it is still a problem.

BREMER: The prewar demand for electricity was estimated by our people at 6,000 megawatts a day. The prewar production was 4,000 megawatts a day though the name-plate capacity was 5000MW. So Saddam's government had been producing at most only 2/3 of the power required. This was largely hidden from foreigners because what Saddam held majority of the electricity for Baghdad. So before the war, Baghdad was getting 16 to 18 hours a day but Basra was getting two hours a day; Najaf and Karbala almost nothing and so it went outside the capital. The lack of electrical capacity production was hidden from foreign view because foreigners couldn't travel around Iraq without minders. The gross picture was 6,000 demand, 4,000 production. When I arrived we were producing only 300 megawatts. So we were producing about 5% of prewar demand.

One of the first things we did was to remove all external tariffs in order to encourage Iraqis to take money out from under their mattress and spend it. We needed to jump start

the economy. This action sparked a huge influx of white goods immediately; refrigerators, washing machines, television sets. We removed Saddam's ban on satellite television; satellite dishes came in. The price of satellite dishes when I arrived was $150 and when I went back into the bazaars three weeks later, I noted that the price had dropped to $50. This was a good sign.

But all this new activity also meant a very large increase in electricity demand. Since prewar they were only producing 2/3 of demand and demand was going up fast, we established a goal to get back to prewar levels by October 1st though we knew that even that amount would not meet the rising demand. We succeeded. We produced 4,465 megawatts the first week of October. We were able to sustain that prewar electrical power production and sometimes increase it to about 5,000 megawatts the entire time the CPA was there, until July 2004.

It was hard to explain to the Iraqis why it was so hard to get additional mega wattage on-stream. Their attitude was that we had thrown out Saddam in three weeks, something they had tried without success for thirty years. "So why can't you give us electricity? " We had to explain three problems. First, it costs about a billion dollars per megawatt. Second, it takes time. You can't just conjure up a power plant -- it has to be planned, designed and built. Thirdly, we had constant attacks on the electrical distribution network, in particular, the 400 KV lines. These were the "main arteries" which took the power from north to south and in rings around the major cities.

Q: Was this the way we went after ball bearings against Germany? I mean, was there a plan to go after electricity?

BREMER: There's no question. In the memo of January, 2003 I mentioned earlier, one of the targets that Saddam outlined for post conflict resistance was electrical infrastructure. The 400 KV distribution network, which was ring distribution element to get electricity around, had big towers. They were up to 100 feet tall. Saboteurs were knocking them down. If you knock one down you pull down three or four that way; it's like dominos. Then they would steal the copper wire, smelt the wire down into ingots and smuggle the copper out on small lighters into the Gulf. So in addition to an insurgency problem we had a criminal smuggling problem. And of course, when a tower is dropped it takes time to get them back up. Power was a major problem. It still is although I was looking at the State Department figures last week, electrical power generation was about 16% above what it was a year ago. So they are making slow progress. But as the economy improves, demand continues to go up. So there's still have a gap.

Q: What about the detainees?

BREMER: Here's the problem. The Coalition military was running operations in villages, towns, cities and sweeping up thousands of Iraqi men. It became clear to me towards the end of July, 2003, that we didn't have a very good system for tracking who these people were and whether they posed a real threat to our soldiers and to Iraqis.

A very senior and respected Kurdish jurist told me that the military had swept up a man who had been on Iraq's Supreme Court. We talked earlier in the interview about the fact that a lot of people in the regular judicial system were not tainted. This Kurd said to me, "Look, you picked this guy up, he's 76 years old, he has a heart condition, he is being held at your detention center in Umm Qasr", which is in the south. This was in the summer and daytime temperatures are in the 130s down there. "He is on the dirt floor there. We've got to get him out for his health." He added "I'll give you my word. He is not a problem and he will not become a problem but we must get him out."

I agreed and immediately raised the case with General Sanchez. It took the military two weeks to confirm to Sanchez that they had this man because their lists were so disorganized. Even after that, it took another ten days to get him released into the custody, on parole, of the Kurd. I got letters all the time and people came into military posts everywhere saying, "What happened to Ahmed? He was here last night. Your guys picked him up. We need to know where he is." And our system, as the case with the senior judge showed, was unable to answer the question.

So it was obvious that we had a problem. The CPA pushed hard for the military to do two things. First of all, get a computerized system across all of the military units, not just the 4th ID, or the 101st or the 82nd; all of these units and figure out a way to post the comprehensive list regularly on all the police stations and courthouses in the country so that people could at least find out if we were holding their husband or son. Once that was in hand, I encouraged the military to set up a system to assess each detainee with the goal of releasing those who we judged were innocent or posed no further danger.

By early fall 2003 the military began to get a rudimentary list process in place. But there was still no process for assessing and releasing large numbers of detainees. And the number was growing every month. It appeared to us in the CPA, that by the summer of 2004 at the rate we were going, we would have something 12,000 or 15,000 detainees, when the occupation ended. Well, as we speak today we still have the problem.

In terms of recidivism, I never saw any studies that showed what percent of the people who were released returned to attack. There may be some figures around. It stands to reason that we probably released some people who attacked us again. But I have never seen figures on it.

Q: Today is June 22, 2009. Let's talk about the Kurds. What were you hearing? Were you involved with the Kurds in some of your previous incarnations?

BREMER: I guess there were two very indirect exposures to the Kurds. First when I was Henry Kissinger's chief of staff in the '70s and the shah was still in power, the U.S. government had a program of supporting the Kurds. This the shah objected to because the Kurds are an important minority in Iran. He persuaded the president -- it was '75 so it must have been Ford -- to stop the support for the Kurds. Many Kurds did not forgive the U.S. government.

Q: How did the support manifest itself?

BREMER: I don't remember the details. I think it was a covert action program. Then when I was ambassador at large for counterterrorism in the second Reagan administration and monitoring terrorist groups all over the world, the Kurdish PKK, which is the Turkish Kurdish terrorist group now largely based in northern Iraq was one of the many we followed. It didn't make a big impression on me at the time since our focus was on groups like Baader Meinhof, Action Directe and others. The PKK was just on the long list of other groups.

Q: As you are were going out, was anybody talking to you about watch them Kurds or anything of that nature?

BREMER: No, I knew from just following the news that the Kurdish part of Iraq had been under American and British protection, a no-fly zone, since 1991 and that they had developed a relatively autonomous area in Iraq. I don't remember any major emphasis on the Kurds in my pre departure briefings other than it was obviously a different part of Iraq and had had a different experience over the last 12 years. I also knew that the Kurdish military force, the Peshmerga, had fought by our side in the war to overthrow Saddam. They had been our ally.

Q: Did you ever run across Peter Galbraith whom I have interviewed?

BREMER: I ran across him after I got to Iraq. I did not see him or know him before I got there.

Q: When you got there, how stood the sort of Kurdish situation and what were we working on?

BREMER: The general strategic situation was that the Kurdish region had benefited greatly from American protection after the '91 war and had developed economically and politically. They had had elections. The two main parties; the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) which is the group based in Sulaimaniya in the east of the Kurdish region and headed by the current Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, and Massoud Barzani who headed the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) in the west. They had fought a civil war in the mid-'90s and had more or less come to an armed truce with help from American diplomats. So there were tensions between the Kurdish parties and there were obviously tensions between the Arabs and the Kurds. Saddam Hussein had copied Stalin's system of relocating groups to weaken them, particularly by moving Sunni Arabs into places like Kirkuk and Mosul where there had been strong Kurdish elements. The small group of exile leaders that the State Department had been talking to before the 2003 war, included the two Kurdish groups. There were seven exiles in the group consulted before the war, which meant that with two Kurds out of the seven the Kurds were slightly over weighted. But as I mentioned, the Peshmerga had fought alongside American troops in the north. So they were in every sense our allies and had significant expectations about the role they would play after Saddam's overthrow.

Q: Did you find with our military, and I am going back to my Vietnam days and in Vietnam our military got sort of an infatuation with the Montagnards and all. You know, these are free, independent people living up there and they are a lot more fun than city dwellers and particularly Arab city dwellers. Did you find in our military this was coming up?

BREMER: There was an affinity with the military because they had had a very intense relationship with the Kurds from '91 to 2003. We had been protecting them; there were American military forces on the ground in northern Iraq during that time. The American military under then General Garner had run a major successful humanitarian operation to relieve the Kurds.

Q: Operation Provide Comfort.

BREMER: Operation Provide Comfort and they had fought alongside us in the north. The Peshmerga was generally considered by our military to be the best trained of the Iraqi militias. They were a serious military force. You never knew how many but there were, probably between 100-120,000 of them. So it was a significant military force.

Q: When you arrived there, you've got the Sunnis, the Shia, maybe some others and the Kurds. What did you feel you could do?

BREMER: The CPA two major, immediate objectives; one was to get a political process started, to get Iraq on the path to a representative government; the other was to get the economy going because the economy was literally flat. If Iraq's economy had been in an ICU, which is where it belonged, all the vital signs would be flat.

On the political side, just to continue with the Kurds, our government had been talking for six or eight months to a group of exiles which included the Kurds, the Sunni, the Arabs, the Shia, Christians, Turkmens and there was a general assumption that we would move quickly towards trying to establish an interim government.

So my main objective when I got to Iraq was to figure out how we could get from where we were to some kind of representative government. The Iraqis we consulted -- Kurds, Sunni Arabs, Shia, Christians, Turkomens -- all said that Iraq needed a new constitution. While the British had written a pretty good constitution for the Iraqis in 1925, Saddam and the Baathists had basically torn it up. Saddam's 1970 constitution which was in effect when we got there was completely useless. It established the revolutionary council as the sole authority in the government. There was no countervailing power, there was no independent judiciary, there was no parliament; there was just an executive, Saddam. So the Iraqis said we need a new constitution. The question of a new constitution had been part of the discussions in the U.S. government had conducted with Iraqis long before I arrived.

The first week I was in Iraq, I met with the small group of seven men mentioned before. I told them that the political process was going to take time. They were not happy because they had gotten the impression from Garner and his colleague, Zalmay Khalilzad, that we would immediately hand over authority to their group. As I mentioned earlier, at this point, in early May 2003, the military was still planning to get out fast too. They had a plan to withdraw some 80% of our troops within three months.

Secondly I told the group of seven that everybody we had consulted suggested the need for a new modern constitution. The Iraqis would write that constitution. This was going to take time. Finally the Coalition wanted to work with a broad and representative group of Iraqis on the political process. I pointedly noted that there were no women at the table. Yet women certainly represented a majority of Iraqis. There were no representatives of the small Christian or Turkomen minorities. There were few Iraqis who had actually stayed in Iraq under Saddam. Sunni Arabs were underrepresented. I challenged the group to broaden itself to become more representative and suggested we have a follow up meeting in two weeks.

Q: Did you find as you were talking to this exile group particularly, that was your initial point of contact essentially. Knowing how these things work, particularly when they are in exile, they tend to form into groups and hate each other and all of that. Did you find all these currents going through?

BREMER: I thought there were two things going on. One was that the exile groups had, as you suggest, been maneuvering with and against each other in exile for some years, not surprisingly. The two Kurds had actually fought a war against each other eight or nine years before. So there were some tensions.

Secondly, I had lived in three countries that had been occupied by the Germans during the Second World War. I am an amateur historian and have read a lot of history about France, the Netherlands and Norway under German occupation. I knew from that and from talking to people in those countries that there is always tension between the people who are in exile -- in those cases most of the exiles spent the war in England -- and the people who stayed under occupation. So at least historically when the exiles come back and try to take charge, the people who stayed behind replied, "No, we suffered under the Germans. You were living in posh exile in London while we were harassed and deprived here in…" -- fill in the blank, France, the Netherlands, Norway or other places. It's not an exact analogy. The Iraqi's had not been under foreign occupation because Saddam was an Iraqi. But the problem of integrating the returning exiles to Iraq was similar. These Iraqi exiles who had been living in London or Tehran or Damascus returned to Iraq expecting to be in charge. So there was also a broader political tension which we understood. It meant that we needed to try to find a broader based group of people for the Interim Government -- especially Iraqis who had stayed under Saddam. This was part of the challenge which I made to the group of seven in my first meeting.

Q: I served in various countries where exile and people go to the United States from the country and become American. Once they have done that they are out of the game,

practically because the people who have been left behind feel, well, they deserve that. Was it that in looking through the people in Iraq you couldn't come up with leaders or because of the Saddam repressive regime or that the exiles were sort of knocking all the potential leaders out?

BREMER: There was a legitimate need for the skills that exiles brought back to Iraq. Saddam had been in power for 35 years, three times as long as Hitler ruled in Germany. There was not much left of a middle class with technical skills to call on. I remember calling on the acting minister of health the first week I was there. He pointed out that there was no internet allowed and you could not, even as a government official, attend conferences outside the country without Saddam Hussein's personal approval. So, if you were a doctor and you wanted to attend a symposium on tuberculosis or whatever your specialty was, in Lucerne, you had to send a memo to your department head. Your department head had to send a memo to somebody higher up in the ministry. Then the minister had to send a memo to the revolutionary council and the revolutionary council had to ask Saddam if the doctor could make the trip to Lucerne. Usually by the time the answer came down, the conference had already taken place, unless they intended for the applicant to go. So the medical profession was, at a minimum, 20 years out of date. Think of what changes there had been in medicine between 1991 and 2003. There was a real dearth of skill sets. So you could see that some exiles at least had been out in the broader world and brought needed skills. They were obviously going to have to be used in some fashion. Finding people who had lived under Saddam who had political support was almost an oxymoron because in Saddam's time, if you had political support you were either a Baathist or you were dead.

Q: Well, how did you work this?

BREMER: We challenged the small group of exiles to broaden themselves. We said, "Look, you are Iraqis. You know this place. Go out." I was particularly insistent on them finding some women. There was a lot of talk about who was in the majority -- Shia, Sunnis, Kurds. Since there had been no reliable census since 1957, everybody claimed they had a large portion of the population. The Shia said, we're 70% of the country. The Kurds said they were 45%. The Sunnis said no, we are a majority. Nobody knew. But one thing I knew for sure: women were a majority because so many men had been killed in the wars and by Saddam. Since this was the case, I told them I was surprised and disappointed that there was no woman among them.

I told them we would meet again in two weeks and urged them to come back with a broader group representing broader sectors of Iraqi society, especially women. We met again in two weeks and they came up completely empty handed. No new faces at all. So we deployed our political team which was a joint American-British team of Arabic speaking experts, plus others. They spent the next two months traveling around the country. We also asked all local Coalition military commanders to identify people in their area of responsibility who might be considered as effective political representatives.

Our goal was to set up some kind of a political council. We didn't know quite how big, but some manageable size. That process led to the identification of some 80 or 85 men and women from all over the country. These were interviewed by me and the British representative and our teams. We wound up with what we called the Iraqi Governing Council about two months after I arrived there with a reasonably representative group of people.

Q: You are pointed to something that seems to be with us today. I just heard the other day there are all sorts of things in the legal system in Iraq. We're talking about six years after you left that haven't been acted on by their legislature. It doesn't seem to be a very responsive culture or not. Is it just that they were so downtrodden by Saddam?

BREMER: I think they are more or less following the trajectory you see in other post conflict societies.. It may be somewhat harder in Iraq than in Bosnia or Kosovo or Haiti or Indonesia. Any transitions take time. Look at Russia. We are now 20 years after the fall of Soviet communism and the Russians if anything are going backwards. I think we have to understand these transitions take time.

You have experience in Latin America. Look at Venezuela. Venezuela has come full cycle. It was more or less like it is today in the '50s. They grappled their way forward in the '60s, '70s. They finally got the message that you need to open your economy. Then they had the setback in '92 and now they are going backwards again.

These transitions are hard everywhere. It was particularly hard in Iraq. Saddam's was one of one of the most repressive regimes anywhere in the world at the beginning of this century. The comparison with Hitler is apt because Saddam intentionally modeled his methods of control through the Baath Party and multiple secret services, extraordinary military courts, he modeled it on what Hitler did. He said openly that he admired the way Hitler had been able to control his people. When you realize that Saddam was in charge of the country three times as long as Hitler, you can begin to get a sense of the major psychological impact his tyranny had on Iraqis. My psychologist daughter said that Iraq was itself suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. She was right.

Yeah, it's been hard. I think what has been extraordinary is how far they have come in historic terms in a rather short time.

Q: One thing reading your book and looking at the thing, I think one of the remarkable things is at least there was an outline of a government when you left, you know, in a year, starting from near zero.

BREMER: The conventional wisdom these days in this town is that our occupation was too long. We should have left sooner. I think the historical assessment will be the opposite; that ideally, it would have been better to have been able to take the time follow our original plan: that is to see the Iraqis through a new constitution, a referendum on a new constitution, and then elections for an elected and sovereign Iraqi government. That

process would have taken longer, at least another year. Politically, it was impossible, both here and there. So it is just an interesting hypothetical.

Q: Was there any thought at any particular time while you were there of 'Oh, screw this. Let's get out and let them settle it'?

BREMER: As I have written in my book, there were pressures developing within the US government by the time the insurgency picked up steam in the fall of 2003. The insurgency was picking up and there was significant pressure in the Pentagon to simply give up the path we were on, hand over immediately to the interim government and get out. The pressures were on both the military side and among some civilians at DOD. I came back on consultations at the end of October of 2003. I told the president I thought that course would be irresponsible.. We had said we were going to help the Iraqis put in place the elements of representative democracy, which to me meant at a minimum helping them draft a modern constitution. If we left now, I felt, we would leave the Iraqis with no viable political path forward. That was likely to mean more violence, possibly even a civil war. We needed to stick it out. We had to do the right thing for history even though I recognized that we were only a year away from a Presidential election. The President agreed.

I hadn't asked for this job. I wasn't looking for another star. So I was just going to recommend that the US do what I thought was right and tell the president what I thought was right. If he wanted to get somebody else to do the job a different way, that's all he had to do. He just had to say fine and Francie and my family would have said, "Thank God."

Q: What was your judgment of the consequences if we'd done that?

BREMER: It would have quickly deteriorated. There would have been no political structure in place, no path to representative government, no constitutional framework to define the political structure, no agreed path forward. At that point, there were no competent Iraqi security forces. We had only graduated the first battalion of the Iraqi army on October 3. So there was only one trained Iraqi battalion. There were about 30,000 Iraqi police most of them 18 year old kids who had been handed an AK-47, given three days of training, put a patch on their shoulder that said "IP" and sent into the streets. Hardly what you would call a reliable trained force. So there would have been no national security force nor was there a national command structure. It would have been utter chaos. It would probably have provoked Kurdish secession from Iraq. I think the Kurds would have washed their hands. They at least had a military force to defend themselves in the north and I think they would have seceded.

I have said and I still believe that a Kurdish declaration of independence from Iraq, will bring on a regional war. Neither the Turks nor the Iranians can tolerate the attraction of a truly independent Kurdistan in Iraq. The Iranians can't afford to allow the appearance of a major independent Kurdish country across the border. So it would have led to a larger

regional war and a major sectarian war in Iraq with militia and with no Iraqi force under national command to stop it. It would have been utter chaos.

Q: When you are doing this, what are you calling upon or people you are calling upon or past experience or something, "OK, here are my priorities and this is what I gotta do."

BREMER: I was lucky; I was not a regional expert. But I had some exceptionally able Arabic speaking American and British diplomats. One British deputy, John Sawers, was at that time serving as British ambassador to Cairo. He went on to become the number one guy in the British foreign office. He is now British ambassador to the U.N., an exceptionally able guy. I had recruited, Hume Horan, probably the U.S. government's leading Arabist who had served in Iraq twice before as a diplomat. Ryan Crocker who had also served in Iraq in the '70s and subsequently went back as ambassador to Iraq after I left, was another member of our team. We had a group of very good people.

On the economic side we also had some very able people; Peter McPherson who had been director of USAID organization in the early '80s. David Oliver a retired three star admiral who helped with the Iraqi budget. We had people who could help us put meat on the bones of the strategic direction that for the economy. But the strategic direction had been laid out by the president before I went to Iraq. Get the economy going, help the Iraqis put in place a process that leads to representative government.

Q: On the economy, from all accounts, modern economy depends on power and of course, power is either electric or something, well, basically electricity. Saddam hadn't made any investment and then the war had come and then the looting had come. Could you go anywhere with this economy? Did they have anything?

BREMER: We saw through this immediate step of lifting the tariffs, a real explosion of economic activity on the streets of towns all over the country -- Basra and Diwaniyah and Baqubah and Mosul. It was really quite extraordinary how quickly the street level economy picked up. Iraqis were taking money from somewhere and getting the economy moving.

Then we started some big public works programs, a big program of micro financing for women in the south because in the heavily Shia south women weren't supposed to leave their homes. So we set up a 10 million dollar micro loan program to give women funds to go into business. For example some bought sewing machines which allowed them to have a business without leaving home. Then they would hire three nieces and the next thing you know, you've had six people working at somebody's home.

We pushed hard on these quick-dispersing programs. Meanwhile we started to take steps on the big macroeconomic which in the long run were more important. Here too we had considerable successes.

Q: Did you find that entrepreneurs were springing up all over the place?

BREMER: Entrepreneurs were springing up in street level businesses. The Iraqis have always been good traders. They have a trading tradition, particularly in the south in cities like Basra, a port.

But there was no what the Germans call mittelstand, medium sized private businesses. There were 192 state-owned enterprises, which were value destroying entities. Their operations did not produce enough income to cover their cost of capital. Even today they continue to destroy because we were unable to do much with them in the short time available. Then there were the street level stores. But there was almost nothing in between. The few "independent" middle sized firms had all been co-opted one way or another into the Baathist government's programs. It was the only way they could survive.

In the summer of 2003, several large American companies were already operating under contracts which had been let before I arrived. The biggest one was Bechtel. They were doing work on the port in the south and building bridges and working on the airport in Baghdad. I hoped that perhaps we could use these contracts to support existing Iraqi companies. So I suggested to the American firms that they set a goal of placing 70% of their subcontracts with Iraqi firms. They tried, but told me that they just couldn't find competent Iraqi firms for most of the contracted work, Eventually they were able to get work placed out to Iraqi firms but it took most of the year the CPA was there. The economy faces a structural problem familiar to the region, which is its almost total dependence on one commodity. And that commodity is owned by the government which is never very healthy.

Q: That's oil?

BREMER: Yes, oil and gas.

Q: What about water and irrigation? I remember at one point when I came into the Foreign Service in the mid-'50s, Iraq was pointed to as a place that had great potential. You had the two rivers going right through and this old irrigation system which had been destroyed but was, could have been revived and could have been a great agricultural country.

BREMER: There were two problems; the best agricultural land is largely south of Baghdad in "Mesopotamia", the land literally between the two rivers. There were two problems and both of them caused by Saddam. After the war to expel Iraq from Kuwait in 1991 the Shia rose up against Saddam. We discussed earlier how he had sent his army to slaughter innocent Shia citizens all over the region. Another punishment he instituted was to forbid the Shia from maintaining their canals. So the canals which are essential to the region's agriculture silted up and became saline in large areas of the south. Saddam also destroyed many of the natural dams on the Euphrates to flood the marshlands down in the south. This is the area where the Marsh Arabs have lived for millennia. He destroyed their way of life. It was basically a form of environmental terrorism.
The second problem related to the agricultural sector went back to the mid-'90s. Saddam established a "food basket" which was distributed to every Iraqi family each month. The

content of the monthly food basket was determined by the ministry of trade. Every month you would go with your coupon to some distribution place, there were 44,000 distribution centers and pick up your basket of food. There were a lot of problems with this. One of them was the cost. The food basket was costing the Iraqi government about three billion dollars a year -- on a government budget of $12 billion. So it was a quarter of the Iraqi budget.

Secondly, the system disincentivized homegrown agriculture. Most of the food was imported which resulted from or created lots of corruption. Whoever was in charge of the food basket, would be given X amount of money. He would use X minus his percent to buy supplies in Jordan or somewhere else and import it. So the program was very expensive and it disincentivized local agriculture.

One of the very first quick spending things we did was in the south to deal with the agriculture problems there. The minister of irrigation told me about the silted up canals in the south and said if we could gave him 20 million dollars he could create thousands of jobs in the region by having them clean up the canals. We did that and he hired over 100,000 people, men and boys to do the clearing out; the women to keep track of who got paid.

So water is a very important part of the potential richness of Iraq. It is not yet fully realized.

Q: Did you find that you had this political structure you are talking about trying to build up. Who was coming out of the Iraqi woodwork to be effective leaders?

BREMER: All kinds of people were coming out of the woodwork saying they were effective leaders. The question is which ones were? We approached it in various ways. We knew we had to mobilize women somehow. Early on the British organized a conference of women's groups. Now, who they were is not all that clear. There was a women's Communist group because Saddam had been essentially looked the other way with the Communists. I suppose he figured their politics were closer to his and they were also secularists. There were a number of other women's groups at the conference They had all been in Iraq, these were not exiles. Our objective was to see if we could identify from these meetings some potential leaders. At the meeting, I commented about our plans for an interim government up and running and mentioned the fact that, as women were a majority of Iraq's population, we needed good representatives. Several women responded politely and committed themselves to cooperate.

Then all hell broke loose. Somebody down on right side of the table across from me started shouting at another woman who was on the near side. Our translator could hardly keep up. What it boiled down to is that the woman on this side shouted, "Those women over there are secret Baathists and they are pretending to be…". The others just as loudly denied the accusation and said that the accusers themselves were secretly Baathists. The first group was denounced loudly and with considerable passion by many around the table. The British determined later that the initial group of women had smuggled

themselves into the meeting under the guise of being democrats. In any case it was not easy to sort out who was going to represent the women who had been politically active before liberation and yet could be effective in the new government. Now, who knew? Maybe the ones making the accusation were the Baathists. It was hard to sort out.

Q: Could you get groups together and say, "OK, you have had disputes but let's all get together. We've got a job to do and do it." Or was this in the culture or not?

BREMER: Yes and no. One of the conventional wisdoms is there really aren't "Iraqis" because their country is only a century old. But Iraqis have a deep and immediate sense of their shared history and are proud of it. You don't talk to an Iraqi long before he is talking about Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar and the Caliphs of Baghdad. So it may be that the state of Iraq is only a hundred years old, but the concept of Mesopotamia is very deep. So there is a sense of Iraqi nationalism that cuts across sectarian and even ethnic lines.

On the other hand, as we discussed before, it is a fact that the Sunnis had run the country for hundreds of years under the Ottoman Turk, under the British, under the British appointed Hashemite monarchy and, of course, under the Baathists. The group that had been in power for a very long time under various rulers was suddenly no longer going to be in charge of the place. That was an uncomfortable fact but it was a fact and it is still a fact.

Q: I have the feeling you had been searching for some way to get everybody to say, "OK, let's do this", to get them to work together rather than dwell on their old animosities.

BREMER: Yes, that was a challenge. It was understandable that there would be a lot of tension for the Shia and Kurds against the Sunnis because of the most recent experience under Saddam. Early on we drew their attention to the example in South Africa where the government had established a reconciliation process. All of the Iraqis in essence said we are just not ready for that. Toward the very end of our time in Iraq I earmarked one hundred million dollars from the Iraqi budget to fund two aspects of a reconciliation process. First it established a property restitution commission. A lot of properties had been illegally taken by Saddam when he did these population moves, particularly moving Sunni Arabs to the north. The rest of the money was to establish a commission on national reconciliation. They still haven't gotten there yet. But they are on their third elected government now and the elections have begun to get have a higher participation, I think they will eventually get there, but it will not be easy and it is not inevitable that they will succeed.

Q: What sort of leaders were you continually sort of observing and vetting leaders, you know, leadership and all?

BREMER: As we discussed earlier, We sent CPA political experts out into the provinces to try to find Iraqis who could be political representatives of all facets of Iraqi society. We asked military commanders for suggestions. Working also with Sergio de Mello, the

UN representative, we wound up with a list of some 80-85 candidates. But that would be an unwieldy committee. Our goal was to establish the smallest group that could also be representative. So we decided to shoot for a Governing Council of somewhere between 20 and 30 Iraqis. Then the question was how do you sift and sieve. Our colleagues met with a lot of these people and occasionally they would ask me and John Sawers, the British deputy, to meet with them to vet these candidates.

I tell in my book about the secretary of the Iraqi Communist Party whom the British thought might make a good member. I told the British that I had no objection to including a communist as long as he more or less shared the same objectives we had, representative and economically liberal government. Sawers and I met him. He was a rather aged man, who moved and spoke slowly. During the course of a pleasant conversation, I asked what he thought of the recent changes in Russia. When he started talking about Brezhnev I got the distinct impression that he thought Brezhnev was still running the Soviet Union, whereas he had died years ago. So we took this guy off the list. But we subsequently found a younger communist who was a very effective and conscientious member first of the Governing Council and then of the Iraqi Parliament, where he still serves.

Our team interviewed scores of people from all over the country and from all sects and ethnic backgrounds. Our biggest problem then and successive governments was finding effective leaders of the Sunni Arab community. Many Sunni Arabs were concerned about the shift of power we talked about. Some had joined the insurgency. So we had a problem identifying qualified Sunni Arabs. We did find some, one of whom became the first president of Iraq, Ghazi al-Yawer.

Q: As you moved in and this emphasis on getting women into the process, did you find, had they been getting essentially the education, by that I mean, what sort of group were you dealing with?

BREMER: It depended. In the Kurdish region, women had been involved in government since 1991. So there were extremely able women who had served in the Kurdish government. The first minister of public works was a Kurdish woman who stayed on in the sovereign Iraqi government. Because they had the 12 year experience it was generally the case that the Kurds were well educated and had some government experience. The minister of irrigation I mentioned earlier was a Kurd.

I interviewed scores of Shia women in the south. They tended to be in specialized areas. They were well educated, things like dentistry, OB GYNs, because under their tradition men could not attend medically to women. So they tended to be well educated but in rather specific areas, some lawyers. But finding qualified women was also a challenge.

Q: How did you sort of get a team working when you've got the Kurds, Sunnis and Shia?

BREMER: Well they had a hard time working together. Working with the UN Special Representative, Sergio de Mello , we were able to get Iraqi Governing Council appointed within six weeks. The first task I suggested to them was to appoint Iraqi Ministers to all

the government ministries. This they did and those ministers took office on September 1, 2003. From then on until the CPA left, these men and women ran the Iraqi government which became a bit of an annoyance for the Governing Council. I think the Governing Council had not focused on the fact that by appointing the ministers and then not setting in place a system for holding the ministers responsible to the Governing Council, they had ceded considerable power to the ministers.

We in the CPA suggested to the Governing Council that to be effective, the GC should have its own staff to help their members stay informed about government business and to be able to propose new policies to the Ministers. They should also, we advised, arrange for hearings, as other legislatures do, where they could call ministers before them to account for the policies, budgets and plans. The Governing Council never took advantage of either opportunity.

The Governing Council also had rather leisurely work habits. They would come into session at 10 in the morning and by about noon someone would say, "Well, it's time for lunch." They'd have a lavish lunch and adjourn.

Q: Well, the governing council was sort of a mini parliament, would you say?

BREMER: Well, it did have legislative authority except in the end, in order to become a law, I had to sign any proposed law they passed. They passed laws all the time, or what you would call bills, and I signed them. The only time I refused to sign a bill was in December 2003. . At that time the Shia Islamist president of the council (the presidency rotated every month) rushed through a session of the council a bill imposing Sharia law throughout Iraq. I told them I would not sign it. So it never did become law. Eventually the draft bill was repealed by a subsequent session of the Governing Council at our suggestion.

They had legislative authority. But as mentioned they didn't have the staff to think through the consequences of proposals they considered. For example, there was always a lot of back and forth about de-Baathification. At one session of the Governing Council, a member noted that a lot of people had lost their jobs in ministries during Saddam because they were not sufficiently "Baathist." So the Council passed a bill that provided that anybody who had lost their job during Saddam Hussein's 30 year reign could come back to their previous job.

It's hard to describe the uproar that resulted. It meant that thirty years worth of people who lost their jobs were going to come back to their jobs -- so maybe there would be ten claimants on a job in the Ministry of Transportation -- and that job was already taken. We asked the Council if it had costed out the proposal, because after all such a step would have a major impact on the Iraqi state budget. They hadn't considered that.
I can understand the political attraction of passing such a law and then saying you've done it. But the effect was not very helpful. Iraqi Ministers started calling me the next

day saying, "I've got 500 people lined up outside my office today saying they had come to claim back their old jobs here. What do I do?"

Q: As you were doing that, in the first place on your own staff, OK, you are working 10, 12 15 hours a day and the people you are supporting are having long lunches and siestas and all. Was there a feeling of almost contempt building up?

BREMER: No. Basically, we were able to work with the ministers. The ministers were in place by September 1. I went and called on each of the ministers individually, which was an important distinction for the Iraqis because Saddam never went to see a minister. The ministers came to him and very often it was a one way trip. So we worked with the ministers. The CPA had senior advisers in each of these ministries and the advisers helped the ministers. At my initial meeting with each of the ministers I told them, "You are in charge of the ministry's budget; you're in charge of personnel and you are in charge of policy. Please keep your senior adviser informed so that the CPA can support your efforts. But you are running your ministry now. We will help you."

In our view, the Governing Council was not talking advantage of our offer when they took office to help them. At the first meeting with the GC on July 13 2003 I gave them a list of issues we thought Iraq needed to deal with urgently. We asked for their advice and assistance on this whole range of issues. What to do about the education system? What to do about the currency which was no longer valid? What to do about power generation? We gave them a list of more than a dozen urgent issues on which we sought their advice. The GC was never able to play that kind of a role, not the least because they never hired support staff.

Q: I was wondering about the response. Was there something either in the Iraqi soul or in the procedures or the culture or something that, I mean if you've got your governing council and you've got an educational problem in your whole country, do something about it.

BREMER: Some of them, like the small group of exiles that our government had been talking to before the fall of Baghdad, had developed the impression they were going to run Iraq right away. They were frustrated with the fact that now they had to work within the broader group, the GC. As the insurgency developed, I am sure some of them became afraid of being accused of collaborating with the Coalition Provisional Authority. So there was that. Indeed several members of the GC were assassinated.

Some of it was just a lack of understanding about how this process could work. There was a very senior man representing the Marsh Arabs. He was a wonderful tribal leader from the southern province of Maysan. He is still very active. I had a message from him just this week. His experience as a leader tribal leader of the Marsh Arabs would not immediately lead him to understand the process of running a central government in Baghdad.

Q: During the time, did you see things developing within this governing council while you were there?

BREMER: Yes, in the end the Governing Council proved to be a useful mechanism for the process of political transformation because after some months of discussion, the Council agreed to take on the task of writing the constitution. They brought in legal experts to help to write what is the most liberal constitution in the region. This was the single most important political element of the whole political process.

And once the Constitution was drafted the Council agreed to go out of existence when we passed sovereignty to a new Iraqi government. This was very significant. Most political bodies don't voluntarily go out of existence. It took fully six months to bring them to the point where they realized they not coexist with a sovereign Iraqi government. We agreed to pay their salaries and provide for their personal security details for another year after they disbanded themselves, so that probably eased the decision a bit.

Q: As you were developing this did, were there concerns of, was there sort of an anti-American stance taken by some of the people? It is always good to show you're more nationalistic than somebody else. People who were jockeying for positions later on say, "Well, I stood up to Ambassador Bremer."

BREMER: I am sure there was that behind the scenes though it wasn't that overt -- probably largely because they were realistic enough to realize we were the authority and that they depended on us for security. Though as we discussed earlier, security was the area where we let them down. I never felt a great deal of animosity particularly from the Iraqi leaders we're talking about. There were plenty of other Iraqis who wanted to kill me.

Q: Did you find within the various people who were surfacing in the Iraqi political circles, any people with whom you could sit down and sort of let your hair down and really talk to them? Or was it pretty much on a formal basis?

BREMER: In my all of my Foreign Service career I tended to be rather direct with people. I never thought there was much advantage in not saying what's on your mind. So that is the pattern I followed with the Iraqis. I had to be careful because if I said something that wasn't consistent with policy, that was going to create problems. But I tended to be frank with the Iraqis.

Q: There has been criticism. A few cases have been singled out like the stock exchange, so called and all, but did you find that the support and the people coming out during the period you were there, sent by the government were really advancing the cause?

BREMER: By and large. We are talking about a total of something like 3,000 civilians from 25 different countries working for the CPA. I had nothing to say about people coming from other countries and I had very little to say about the people coming from our country because I frankly didn't have time. I chose a few people before I went to Iraq.

But the senior advisers were chosen in by officials in Washington. They were, on the whole, very good. We had problems with a few, but on the whole they were exceptionally dedicated people -- all volunteers. They knew they were going into a war zone. They couldn't bring their spouses. They knew they were going to wear a flak jacket to work and sleep on a cot. So the CPAers tended to be very mission-oriented.

But we never had enough of them. The maximum staffing level we achieved was 56% of what we requested. Even that overstates the effectiveness if the overall staff because so many people came on very short terms tours. For example, the head of the FBI office came for 60 days and then went home to be followed by another agent for 60 days. In the middle of a war, with so many moving parts, it is just very difficult to get your arms around a problem in two months. And what you learn is hard to pass onto the next guy. So short staffing was exacerbated by short tours. But, by and large, the people who came were able and by and large knew their business. They worked hard; they worked very hard often 18 to 20 hours a day, seven days a week.

Q: How about say on the religious side? Muqtada al-Sadr was out of central casting, a brooding scowl and all, dominated TV and all but how did you find sort of the religious equation?

BREMER: The Governing Council had a number of Islamists, both Shia and Sunni and a Kurdish Islamist. The ones who had been in exile, which included two of the Kurdish Shia, had been respectively in Damascus and in Tehran and they had been there a long time. Their families had grown up there. So there was always a question of Iranian influence on some of these people. I didn't over worry about that aspect of Iranian activity because most Iraqis are Arabs, they are not Persians. That's a pretty important difference. They shared the Shia branch of Islam.

Q: This whole idea of Iran and Iraq would get together is

BREMER: Well, they "got together" in the '80s and three million people died as a result. The CG did have religious figures as members. The CPA did deal with other religious figures outside the Governing Council. As we discussed leading the Shia figure, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani had a policy of not meeting with anybody who worked for the coalition. I didn't have a problem with that. I set up a number of back channels to communicate with him. Recently I was looking back through the record. In the 14 months of the CPA, I had more than four dozen communications with him; some of them written letters, some of them oral messages. So we had a pretty intense dialog. The fact that he wouldn't see anyone from the coalition did not create a major problem in communication. As my book lays out, on the whole, Sistani played a responsible role in the political process. He did complicate it for us in a number of ways. But on the whole his vision of a democratic Iraq was not dissimilar from ours.

Q: How about Muqtada al-Sadr?

BREMER: That's a different story. He first came to my attention about the middle of July 2003 when his newspaper printed a list of 124 "collaborators", as he called them. They were mostly interpreters for the military or CPA. Muqtada said that these people deserve to die. And indeed, two of them were killed rather quickly, within two weeks of the article.

At about that same time, our senior adviser in the ministry of justice told me that an Iraqi magistrate had issued an arrest warrant for Muqtada al-Sadr for the murder of Ayatollah al-Khoei. This very senior and respected Shia leader had returned from exile in London and had been killed in Najaf a couple of days after the fall of Baghdad. He represented one of the major Shia families of Najaf. He had been killed, on April 10, on orders by Muqtada al-Sadr according to this Iraqi magistrate.

The Iraqi magistrate had issued an arrest warrant for Muqtada and 22 of his colleagues. Muqtada was in Najaf and the magistrate wanted the Iraqi police to arrest him for murder. However, while the police were prepared to make the arrest, they and the magistrate were concerned that Muqtada's security forces would need to be fended off by Coalition forces. In effect, they wanted the Coalition to establish a perimeter to allow the Iraqi police to affect the arrest.

The CPA senior advisor at the Justice Ministry was a three star general in the army reserve whose civilian job was as a judge in New Jersey. It was clear that arrest would be a sensitive operation, even if conducted by Iraqi police under an arrest warrant issued by an Iraqi magistrate. So I asked the American judge to go down to Najaf to meet the Iraqi lawyers and the magistrate and assess the case against Muqtada. A couple of days later, the judge came back and said he thought the Iraqi magistrate had a solid case. He brought a translation of the charges which I read through and while I am not an attorney it looked like a good case to me, too.

So the question was what to do about the Iraqi magistrate's request for perimeter security. We discussed that with our military. This was the first week of August or end of July. The Marines were in the south and Najaf was in their AOR (Area of Responsibility). The Marines appear to have decided they didn't want to the operation and started sending messages to that effect through military channels. At about the same time, the British started to get cold feet about having the Iraqis arrest Muqtada.

At this time our estimate was that he had about 60 followers though there was no doubt that facilitating his arrest by the Iraqis was going to be a problem. He himself was probably 29 or 30. He was from a great family Muqtada himself had no theological training to speak of. So he didn't have much religious weight in the Najaf majaria, the council of elders as it is called.

The CPA staff and especially the Arabic speaking experts in the south argued in favor of having the Iraq's arrest him. Because of the opposition from our military and the British and a variety of unrelated things, we were unable to do that. I argued then that by not

moving, sooner or later he would get stronger. The CIA's assessment was if we left him along, he would weaken. Well, they were certainly got that wrong.

By October Muqtada's goons were killing American soldiers in Karbala which made it a more important question than the arrest warrant. And then it got worse in early 2004.

Q: You're saying his followers?

BREMER: Yes, his guys. It happened again in February when he kidnapped a couple of Iraqi police in the south, I think in Karbala. One of the policemen escaped and said he had been tortured, that women were in the same prison and they were being raped and tortured. Muqtada then sent his thugs through a town in the south in Qadisiyyah Province where some "gypsies" lived. His guys killed the men and took the women prisoners. I was concerned that we continued to take no action. Here was a guy who seemed to have learned everything he knows from Saddam Hussein. Did we come to Iraq to have this kind of a person running secret prisons where men and women are tortured? But I could never get the American government to decide to do something. So his strength steadily increased until he led a major uprising in April of 2004 when his forces took over three provincial capitals in the south -- Karbala, Najaf and al-Kut. In al-Kut his followers invaded and occupied our CPA office in the process killing a British civilian there. The Coalition forces in al-Kut -- it was a Ukrainian battalion -- just melted away. They went back to their base at the airport and battened down the hatches. Muqtada was a real problem.

Q: The reluctance, was this just, was it our military, was it people didn't want to tangle with a religious leader?

BREMER: In the first case in August of 2003, I think the problem the Marines. This was the regiment that had fought their way through the south. By August 2003, they were getting ready to rotate out of Iraq the first week of September. So I suppose were concerned that his arrest would provoke unrest in their area of responsibility at the very end of their tour. I understood that, but felt we needed to act.

Though I didn't know it at that time, much later I found out that that the commander of Coalition forces in Iraq, General Sanchez, also sent a message through his channels that he didn't want to do the operation. He's apparently written that in his book. At the time he didn't say that to me.

The guy on the ground down there, a Foreign Service officer and excellent Arabist felt very strongly that we should allow Muqtada's arrest. His analysis was if we didn't let the Iraqi police move then, Muqtada would only grow stronger, become more dangerous and vicious. He also felt that if we allowed Muqtada to flaunt the Iraqi law, moderate Shia in the south would be reluctant to associate and support the CPA. His analysis was right. Whatever the military reasoning was -- and I understood the operation was going to be difficult and might to lead to some American causalities -- from a political point of view, we should have moved in August.

Q: (Intern)
I just have a clarifying question about the ministries and their relations to the Iraqi governing council. If there was ever a system put into place about responsibility or are they still acting sort of independently?

BREMER: Today there is an elected Iraqi parliament. Now the ministers are responsible to that parliament. You do read stories about parliament. The parliament has committees on particular subjects, like the British parliament or our Congress; there's a committee on agriculture and they can and I guess do call for formal hearings as our congress does. They are at least are responsible to the parliament.

Q: (Intern)
Do you think the disinterest of the Iraqi governing council to create a system of responsibility is due to the fact that they knew the Americans would if they didn't or were they just disinterested?

BREMER: It was always a debate that we had: are we doing all the work because we are doing all the work? There may have been some of that on the part of the Governing Council. We certainly encouraged them to grab responsibility for all the major issues. We also knew that the CPA, with 3,000 people, could do the GC's staff work if they asked us to do it.

You would almost have to ask each of them what their reasoning was. Some of them probably would say "I don't want to work that hard", some of them may have said to themselves, "let the Americans do it and take the blame." Not an unreasonable position.

An interesting footnote; we passed about 100 laws. Before I left the prime minister, Ayad Allawi, asked me about some law and whether his government had to continue it after his government became sovereign at the end of June 2003. I told him once they were sovereign they could do whatever they wanted with those 100 laws. If the sovereign government didn't like something we had done, it could just repeal the laws. The CPA-era laws explicitly say they are only valid until they are overturned by a sovereign Iraqi government. The Iraqi government was sovereign on June 28, 2004 when the occupation ended.

The sovereign government set up a committee under the deputy prime minister, a Kurd, Barham Salih to review all CPA's economic laws that we had passed. I saw Barham about a year and a half after he had chaired this interagency committee. He told me that after reviewing all the CPA economic laws, the committee decided they couldn't improve on the laws. So they didn't change them.

We did serious work and were careful not to act where it might be a problem. For example we decided to do nothing about how Iraq should organize or run its oil industry. We left this for a sovereign Iraqi government to decide. Which is definitive proof that the war was not about oil. In many areas, we gave the new Iraqi government white papers

written by CPA experts. We said we've done a lot of work here over the last year and we have thought about this problem a lot and here's a paper. You can use it or not use it. It's up to you.

So I think there were different reasons. Some of it maybe to avoid blame. Others perhaps didn't want to work so hard, or were not comfortable on particular subjects. The structure of the problem was they never got the staff and they never really asserted what could have been their authority over the ministers despite our urging.

End of interview